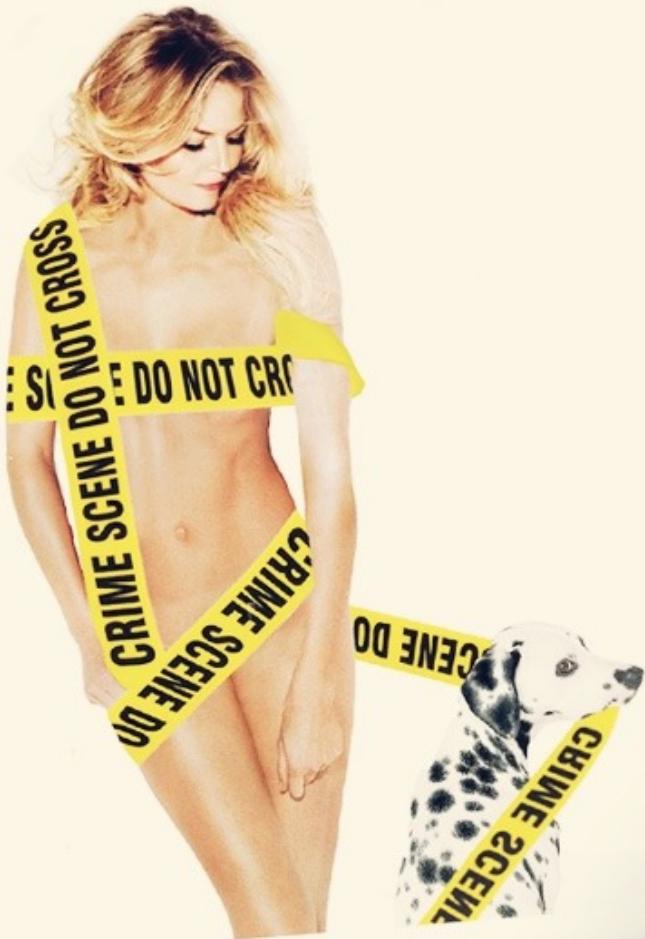


BASED ON CURVYPRAGMATIST FANFIC



2015 FEBRUARY

| DAY | MONDAY | TUESDAY | WEDNESDAY | THURSDAY | FRIDAY | SATURDAY |
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CALENDAR

POSTER BY MISSLANE

Calendar

by *CurvyPragmatist*

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Summary: *While Emma takes part in a charity calendar to raise funds for the library Regina is struggling to control her magic and is dealing with it by staying away from people. Will a persistent Saviour be able to get through to a stubborn ex-Mayor? SwanQueen.*

Alternate Summary: *Henry buys Regina a calendar, Regina wonders why she can't tear her eyes away from Miss September.*

Chapter 1

“Mom?” Henry asked hesitantly as he entered the kitchen after a long day at school.

“Henry,” Regina said without looking up from her vegetable dicing.

“Can I have ten dollars?” Henry edged closer to his adoptive mother, the formidable Evil Queen. A lot had happened between them over the last year, the curse had been broken and he had said many things he long since regretted.

Following Regina’s run-in with Greg and Tamara and the stopping of the trigger Henry had told Emma that he wanted to go back home, to Mifflin Street. Things had settled down, Greg and Tamara vanished, Neal’s loss was mourned and Mister Gold and Regina had set up a new protection spell around Storybrooke to keep people out. Henry knew it was time to go back to his adoptive mother, he wanted to have a relationship with her. He wanted to reward her redemption and find a way to have the relationship they both desperately wanted.

“Of course,” Regina replied, she’d never been bothered about money, “spent your allowance already?”

Henry winced. While Regina was readily willing to provide him with money when he needed it, she was also readily willing to provide him with a lesson in budgeting as well.

He nodded as he approached the kitchen island and sat on the stool there and watched as she effectively chopped and diced vegetables and placed them in little glass bowls, “yeah, I kinda forgot it was coming out tomorrow.”

Regina frowned, “tomorrow’s Tuesday,” she said, expecting that Henry was referring to a comic book and she knew they were always released on a Wednesday.

“Oh,” Henry said with a nod and a smile, “it’s not a comic book, it’s a calendar.”

“A calendar?” Regina paused in her chopping and looked at him, “you’re twelve, why do you want a calendar? And it’s September, why would you buy a calendar in September?”

“It’s for the library,” Henry explained with a frown, “haven’t you heard?”

“Clearly not,” Regina sighed as she dried her hands with a tea towel with red apples embellished on it, “I’m hardly on the distribution list for town news these days.”

After Greg and then the trigger, Doctor Whale had prescribed Regina strict bed rest for at least three weeks, something which Henry took upon himself to personally check she was adhering to. Between them they had managed four days before Regina was crawling the walls in boredom. She spent some time redecorating the house, then a while tending to the garden. Following that she cleared out the garage and then she attempted to go back to the Mayor’s office.

Mary Margaret barred her from the town hall, not because she wished to engage in any power struggle with Regina but because she was genuinely worried for Regina’s health. Regina had whined, actually whined to Snow White, about the level of boredom she was feeling and the ever helpful and chipper younger woman suggested Regina find a hobby to engage in.

Since that day Regina spent most of her time at the stables, she rediscovered her joy of riding and even of spending hours brushing the horses who resided there. Before long Henry was requesting lessons and the two of them spent most weekends at the stables. The downside to it all, if you asked Henry, was that Regina was spending less and less time with the community and more time with the horses.

Henry sighed, “Mom, I told you about the fundraiser for the library...”

Regina looked up at the ceiling thoughtfully, “oh, yes,” she smiled at him, “but what has that got to do with a calendar?”

“Well, the party didn’t bring in much money,” Henry shrugged, “so Ruby suggested they make a calendar.”

“So they have made their own calendar?” Regina asked, “is it about books?”

“Not exactly,” Henry grinned, “it’s a funny calendar.”

“Please don’t let it be full of pictures of cats doing ridiculous things,” Regina shook her head, “I hear you laughing so hard I think you’re going to run out of oxygen when you go on that website.”

“No cats,” Henry shook his head, “promise!”

The timer on the oven went off and Regina jumped a little as she turned around to open the door and grabbed her oven glove.

“So can I have ten dollars?” Henry asked again.

“Of course,” Regina replied, “just take it from my purse,” she indicated her handbag which was put on the sideboard like usual. He hopped off of the stool and took the money out of the purse.

“Thanks, Mom,” he said as he grabbed his school bag and left the room.

Chapter 2

The slamming of the front door signalled Henry's return from school and Regina rolled her eyes at his inability to close a door gently. She knew it would get worse as he got older and soon she'd be close friends with the carpenter that would be on speed-dial to repair the damage.

“Henry,” she called out to him from her downstairs office and waited for him to come in.

He poked his head around the door guiltily, “sorry.”

She put her silver-plated fountain pen down on top of the documents she was working on and removed her black-framed glasses, “I’ll have those ten dollars back,” she jested, “I’ll need it for repair bills.”

Henry grinned, “I bought it for you anyway,” he stepped into the room and removed the backpack from his shoulder and opened the zips, “I got one for free but I wanted to buy one for you.”

Regina cocked her head to one side curiously, “why did you do that, Henry?”

Henry shrugged, “I thought it would be nice for you to get involved in the town again. And if they make enough money and the library reopens then I can study there and slam that door instead,” he grinned.

Regina shook her head with a wide grin, “you’re growing up too fast,” she told him.

He pulled a thick white cardboard envelope out of his bag and put it on her desk, “can I go to Paige’s house?”

“Will Jefferson be there?” Regina asked as she reached for the envelope.

“Yes, Mom,” Henry mock sighed.

“Very well, but make sure you’re back for dinner,” she said as she opened the envelope and pulled out the calendar.

“Sure, what is for dinner?” Henry asked as he zipped his bag back up and threw a strap over one shoulder.

“Lasagne,” Regina whispered as she looked at the calendar and all of the colour drained from her face, “Henry... what is this?”

“It’s like Calendar Girls, you know, that movie?” Henry said with a grin as he walked around the desk and took the calendar from Regina’s hands and began to open it, “in England there were these middle-aged women who wanted to raise money because one of their husbands had died of cancer. They were all part of this club that does baking and knitting and stuff. So they thought it would be funny if they did a calendar naked but covering everything up and they made millions.”

He paused at a tastefully framed black and white photograph of a clearly naked Granny leaning forward on the counter at the diner with two extra-large burgers covering the view of her breasts. Henry laughed warmly and angled the picture towards Regina so she could see it and she laughed, more at Henry’s hysterics than the actual picture.

“This one is good,” Henry said as he took the calendar back and flicked to another month and then burst out laughing as he handed Regina the calendar, this time open to a page where mechanic Michael Tillman was stark naked with his back to the camera while leaning forward to investigate a car engine. Henry was crying with laughter as he pointed to Michael’s rear and Regina shook her head, “I’m worried about you, Henry,” she said jovially.

“It’s funny,” Henry said as he wiped his tears, “so, the calendar starts from September and it goes all the way through to December of next year.”

“So,” Regina picked her pen up and looked at Henry with a serious expression, “you’re telling me that I have to spend the next sixteen months organising my time while looking at naked pictures of people from the town?”

“Yep,” Henry giggled childishly.

“And this was so I could, how did you put it,” Regina thought for a moment, “get involved in the town again?”

Henry grinned, “yup.”

He grabbed the calendar and walked turned to the wall to the left of the desk where Regina had a tasteful slim line calendar of art installations at various European galleries. He removed the calendar from the hook and placed it on her desk with a grin as he opened the calendar to the first page and hung it up, “there,” he smiled, “I’ll see you later for dinner.”

Regina picked up her fine art calendar and watched him leave, “brat,” she whispered but loudly enough for him to hear. She picked up her glasses and put them back on and picked up the piece of paper that she had been looking at when Henry’s door slamming had initially interrupted her. She had been helping the owner of the stables with paperwork for a few weeks now, since the curse had broken and the town no longer automatically ran itself a few businesses had struggled with what was expected of them.

A missed order meant that no horse feed had arrived one week, during the curse it would just appear once the last of the previous delivery had been consumed. But in this new world it had to be ordered and asking that of the stable owner was impossible so Regina had stepped in to ensure none of the horses starved to death due to an error in paperwork.

She picked up her now-redundant art calendar and noted that she had scribbled a reminder to herself for the last week in September. She stood up and brought the old calendar with her as she thoughtfully tapped her fountain pen against her lip and looked at the new calendar on the wall.

She gasped.

Staring back at her were green eyes both shy and strong at the same time. Emma Swan stood posing for a mugshot, holding a piece of card across her chest urging people to donate to the Storybrooke Library Fund. Her hair and makeup where flawless and Regina considered that she looked like a model.

True to proper procedure, there were two photographs, one with Emma facing the camera and a side shot. The photograph where the blonde faced the camera showed an almost bashful Emma, something in her expression told Regina that the blonde was not entirely comfortable but was determined not to show it. The side shot was of Emma laughing, the photograph was almost like an outtake that was too beautiful to be discarded.

Regina felt her eyes drawn to the card and realised that there was a substantial amount of cleavage on display before the card covered Emma's modesty. With a small cough Regina focused on the dates on the calendar and scribbled a few notes before returning to her desk, throwing Emma's picture one last glance before chastising herself and returning to her paperwork.

Chapter 3

After school on Wednesday was the one day of the week that Regina ventured into the town of Storybrooke rather than in the opposite direction of the stables on the outskirts. Wednesday was the day that Henry played soccer after school because as he had grown in size and confidence he had also grown in sporting ability.

While Regina held no interest in any kind of sport she would not miss seeing Henry excel at something for the world. When he had joined the team she had been surprised but happy at the news and had set about purchasing him every piece of sports equipment he could feasibly require.

Worried that her boy was drifting away from her, she had researched the game on the Internet and was now something of an authority on the rules of soccer, even questioning the referee on a couple of early occasions. That was until Henry threatened to ban her from all his matches if she didn't behave so these days she arrived early to get a front row seat and sat with her thermos flask of hot coffee.

Not everyone had been forgiving of her roles as Evil Queen and terrorising Mayor and the crowd of parents at the sporting event were prime examples of those whom had yet to see her redemption as anything other than deceit. She often sat alone on the front row of the hard metal benches, huddled into her thickest coat for warmth and wondering why Henry would have to be interested in a sport that predominantly ran during the winter months.

Emma often worked during Henry's matches, attending a poorly scheduled town hall meeting every Wednesday evening. On rare occasions the meeting was cancelled and Emma would turn up and sit beside Regina and cast baleful glares at the other parents who sat scattered far away from her.

Regina didn't mind the lack of company, she wasn't spending all of her time at the stables without reason. Integrating herself back into Storybrooke was hard work, something she wasn't sure she knew how to do. Apologising

was such a black and white act and the issues surrounding her actions were many shades so she knew she would never apologise for what she had done. The curse had brought her Henry and a strange kind of peace that she never thought possible, while she certainly wasn't happy in the traditional sense she wasn't as unhappy as she had been for the many years prior.

“Hey Mom,” Henry said as he bounded up to her in his soccer gear.

“Hello dear,” Regina smiled at him and quickly stood up and fix his hair which was turning more and more into a disaster but he refused to let her cut it.

Henry rolled his eyes and slumped his shoulders at the maternal gesture but didn't stop her. Since the curse had broken Regina had become very tactile, expressing her love, care and concern for him through touches ranging from hugs and shoulder squeezes to face cleaning and hair maintenance.

“Can I go to Peter’s birthday sleepover tomorrow night?” Henry asked.

Regina paused raking her fingers through his hair and looked momentarily panicked before asking, “tomorrow? That’s a Thursday, Henry...”

“I know,” Henry nodded, “Peter’s mom will make sure we’re all in bed on time and Emma said she’ll pick me up and take me to school on Friday.”

“So, you’ve already discussed this with Emma?” Regina sounded a little hurt.

“Only because I know you don’t like coming into town and Emma would be driving that way to work at that time anyway,” Henry responded, “please, Mom?”

Regina shook the cobwebs from her mind, the lingering worries about Henry not wanting to be with her and reminded herself of her promise to herself to allow Henry more freedoms, “y-yes, of course,” she smiled, “obviously I’ll want the address and telephone number.”

“Yes!” Henry happily turned to his friends who were gathered nervously in this distance and gave them a double thumbs up, “sure, Mom, I have an invite somewhere, I’ll give it to you tonight,” he called over his shoulder as he ran back towards his friends.

Regina watched him run off and mentally gave herself a small smile that she had done the right thing. The path to redemption was indeed hard and long and she was facing daily struggles with right and wrong, having such a difficult upbringing herself had left her with nothing but her small and well-used collection of childcare books to lean on.

“Is this seat taken?”

Regina turned to see David stood beside her with that annoyingly pleasant grin on his face and a thermos flask in his hand. She regarded him quizzically, he had never yet attended one of Henry’s matches.

“Snow is working late so it made sense that I came out here and watched Henry’s match, baseball is it?” David asked with a gesture to the field.

“Soccer,” Regina informed him with small sigh as she gestured for him to sit down on the metal bench before she took her own seat beside him, “not afraid to be seen with the town pariah?”

David frowned as he looked up and down the bleachers and noticed that the few people who were arriving were all sitting far away from them despite their prime front and centre positioning.

“Idiots,” he mumbled under his breath and looked like he was about to stand up and speak to them.

Regina quickly put a firm hand on his knee, “don’t,” she warned him.

“But,” David replied.

“Don’t,” Regina repeated as she removed her hand from his knee and returned to clutching her thermos.

David looked at her and then at the hostile sports fans and then back at Regina with a dejected sigh, “unseasonably cold,” he commented.

“Yes,” she agreed blandly, “although it is nearly October.”

“Hmm,” David smiled shyly, “my month.”

“Your month?” Regina frowned.

“Yes, the calendar,” David said, “Henry told me he bought a calendar for you?”

“Oh,” Regina nodded, “yes, that.”

“I take it you don’t approve?” David asked with a small laugh.

“Giving a calendar full of naked people to my son, not particularly,” Regina sniffed and watched as the teams arrived on the field and began practicing.

David rolled his eyes, “they are not naked, well, they are, but you can’t see anything. It’s tasteful, arty.”

“Keep telling yourself that, Mister October,” Regina retorted.

“You see more in an art gallery, they are full of naked bodies,” David said with a wave of the hand, “the calendar is light-hearted. If a load of middle-aged, middle-class women from England can do it...”

“I’m sure they didn’t sell theirs to children,” Regina quipped.

David looked at her with a serious expression, “look, Regina, I’m sorry if we did something wrong, if we offended you. It was just some fun, we made sure that nothing could be seen and we really did work hard to make sure that it isn’t suggestive, it’s like the film, normal everyday scenes just with a twist.”

Regina bristled a little as she knew it was the truth, Henry was no more corrupted by the sight of Granny and her burgers than he was by the nude

portrait that hung in the guestroom.

“To be honest I was concerned at first,” David admitted, “but when I saw the film and we sketched out some suggestions and everyone seemed to think it was a good idea. I was a little hesitant about getting Henry involved but when he saw Michael’s picture the first thing he did was laugh and point as he said ‘butt’.”

Regina rolled her eyes at her son’s puerile sense of humour before she nodded, “I suppose it isn’t too horrible.”

“Exactly,” David said, “just some fun.”

“Who else is in it?” Regina asked casually.

“Well,” David thought about it and Regina idly considered that the one brain cell was being seriously overstretched at the effort, “Granny, Ruby, the football boys, the nuns...”

“The nuns!?” Regina spun to face David.

“Yeah,” David laughed, “their scene is a tea party, then there’s the guys from the animal shelter, the nurses from the hospital, the dwarves,” David laughed out loud at that one and Regina considered that would be a month to behold.

David continued thinking, “Archie, Emma...”

“Oh, Emma’s in it?” Regina enquired casually and the second she said it she knew she hadn’t managed casual nearly as well as she’d hoped.

“Yeah, twice, we ran out of people who were brave enough to do it and she is September,” he looked at the date function on his watch, “which ends tomorrow, so we got her to do another month as well.”

“Pimping your daughter out, how un-Charming,” Regina shook her head.

David rolled his eyes and shook his head, “she volunteered, well, she did after Ruby spoke to her.”

“Hey, David,” a man Regina didn’t recognise greeted the blonde Prince, “we have a spare seat for you with us, if you’d like?”

“I’m fine here,” David said with an edge to his voice.

“Don’t stay on my account,” Regina told him with a laugh, “run along with your friends,” she said as she stared at the other man.

“And give up the best seat?” David smiled, “no I’m good here, I’ll catch you later, Robert.”

Robert nodded and stepped back over the bleachers to his seat.

“You’re a fool,” Regina shook her head.

“And you’re ungrateful,” David replied with a grin as the game began.

Chapter 4

Emma could hear her parent's gentle disagreeing tones before she even opened the door to the apartment they all shared.

“Don’t fight in front of the kids,” Emma mocked as she walked into the apartment and shrugged off her jacket.

Mary Margaret and David were cuddled up on the sofa and Emma smiled at them, even when they were bickering they were still hopelessly in love.

Mary Margaret sighed, “your father is being ridiculous,” she announced.

David chuckled gently, “I’m not being ridiculous...”

“You’re the person who always says we should never trust Regina,” Mary Margaret pointed out, “and now this...”

“Now what?” Emma queried with interest.

“Your father,” Mary Margaret interrupted before David had a chance to open his mouth, “thinks we should invite Regina over to dinner.”

“I didn’t say that,” David retorted with a smile, “I said I think we should try to engage with her and integrate her back into the town.”

“You suggested I cook,” Mary Margaret responded.

“Okay,” David agreed, “maybe I did suggest dinner, but it was one of a few suggestions.”

“What’s brought this on?” Emma asked as she set about finding her favourite mug and filling it with coffee from the lukewarm pot.

“He’s a softie,” Mary Margaret said as she cuddled into his arm.

David seemed displeased with this new moniker and addressed Emma directly to ignore his wife burrowing into his arm like he was a teddy bear, “I was at the soccer match today and I sat with Regina and I can’t believe how the town is treating her.”

“What happened?” Emma asked with concern as she wondered if she’d be reattaching her Sheriff’s badge and heading back on out again.

“Nothing specific, nothing major,” David reassured her, “she was just sat on her own and no one sat near her, there were mutterings as well. Before the game started there were comments about someone ‘just going home’ and then later whenever Henry’s team was having a good run there would be comments about magic being used.”

Emma frowned, she knew that Regina’s cutting herself off from the town had done absolutely nothing from a pro-Regina public relations point of view but it had been agreed that no one was actually causing harm so there was nothing to be done. But the fact that the dissent was still brewing under the surface and sometimes even bubbled above the surface was concerning.

“I mean, she spent years trying to kill me,” David pointed out, “if anyone should be holding a grudge it’s me! But, no, for the sake of the town I have put all that to one side. We have to live together, we’re family.”

“So, you want to invite her to dinner?” Emma laughed as she hugged the mug in her hands and leaned on the kitchen island.

“Okay,” David held up his hands and stood up in a sulk causing Mary Margaret to pout, “I can see no one agrees with me...”

“David,” Mary Margaret soothed as he walked to the dining room table and picked up a copy of the paper.

“Sorry,” Emma added, “it just seems to strange that you two would even consider hanging out with Regina.”

“Things are different here,” David shrugged as he feigned interest in the front page article on street repairs.

“She’s different here,” Mary Margaret added in agreement.

“Maybe she just needed twenty eight years to chill out?” Emma smiled as she took a sip of her coffee.

“What’s she like with you, Emma?” Mary Margaret asked, “when you go over there to see Henry?”

Emma thought about it with a scrunched up face of indecisiveness and shrugged, “she recently started calling me Emma instead of Miss Swan, unless I’m late and then I’m Miss Swan or Sheriff. Or, if I’m really late or I mess up, and then she doesn’t speak to me at all.”

“Positively friendly considering she tried to poison you,” Mary Margaret nodded her head in seriousness.

“Yeah,” Emma mused before looking at David, “thing is, even if you invited her to dinner, she wouldn’t come. She doesn’t want to lose face.”

“But it’s worth a try,” David looked up at her, “an olive branch. For Henry’s sake.”

Emma nodded, “Henry has been trying to get her to come into town more.”

“She won’t accept an invite from me,” Mary Margaret pointed out.

David looked at Emma and Emma sighed, “I’m the Saviour, the person she thinks is going to take away her son, she tried to poison me with baked goods, why would she accept an invite from me?”

“Because she already declined mine,” David replied only to feel the daggers of staring eyes from his wife and his daughter, “what? I’m Charming, remember?”

Mary Margaret laughed, “you certainly are, my love,” she stood up and approached him from behind and enveloped him in a big bear hug.

“Fine,” Emma muttered as she finished her coffee, “I’ll go over there tomorrow during my rounds and I’ll ask her to dinner. But don’t blame me if

she says no!"

Chapter 5

Regina arrived home on Thursday evening to a dark and empty house. She reminded herself that Henry was only gone for one night and would be back the following afternoon. Although Henry occasionally stayed at the Charming's apartment in the past he lately preferred his own bed for the night and seeing his birth mother during the day or at weekends rather than overnight stays.

Regina had happily agreed but ensured that Henry explained the situation to Emma and her parents himself so it didn't look like she was coercing the boy in any way. As the months after the curse passed and things started to get back to normal Henry had grown in confidence both at home and in school and as a result was making more friends. No longer the social outcast spinning theories about fairy tales, now he was the son of the Evil Queen and the Mayor, the son of the Saviour and the Sheriff and now he was in vogue.

Having experienced a childhood of imprisonment Regina quickly realised that that was not going to help repair old wounds between her and Henry and, although it was difficult for her, she gave him freedom. Henry rewarded the trust by always coming back to her and although it wasn't easy they had fallen into a good pattern, one of trust and respect.

But that didn't mean Regina didn't miss him terribly when he was gone. She'd originally grown to dislike the mansion, realising it was similar to the various castles she had lived in back in the Enchanted Forest. Large, imposing, out of the way and annoyingly drafty so she had set about an extensive redecorating plan and introduced colours and fabrics to the rooms to make them feel more homely.

Having zero experience in interior design meant the process had been difficult but the result was a home that Regina felt more at home in. Except when it was empty and especially when it was empty at night.

Regina sighed and hung up her coat in the closet and unzipped her knee-high, muddy riding boots and slipped out of them. Her light grey jodhpurs had

flecks of caked on mud from her knees up, luckily her white shirt had amazingly remained unscathed but that was mainly due to the navy coloured waist coat and jacket she also wore to the stables.

Placing her boots and jacket in the closet she was surprised to hear a knock on the door. It had been a while since the last drunken citizen hammered on her door and demanded her head for their predicament but the memory remained in her head, especially as Henry had been in the house and she momentarily panicked and not been able to summon her magic which had never happened to her before.

She took a deep breath to steel herself against whatever lay on the other side and opened the door. She let out a sigh, “Miss Swan.”

Emma smiled warmly, “back to Miss Swan again, am I?”

“Henry isn’t here,” Regina announced with annoyance, “as you should know as you...”

“Yes, I know, I’m here to see you,” Emma cut to the chase.

Emma noticed how Regina stiffened at that as she tried to look disinterested, “and how can I help you, Sheriff?”

“Nothing bad, or official,” Emma assured, “just a dinner invite.”

Regina frowned, “you’re asking me to dinner?”

“Sure,” Emma nodded, “we’re like family, after all...”

Regina nodded in understanding, “oh, I see, this is part two of whatever Charming was up to yesterday.”

Emma rolled her eyes, “he wasn’t up to anything, we just want to invite you to dinner.”

Regina looked like she was about to reply when she almost unnoticeably winced and took a breath, “I’m not hungry,” she replied acerbically.

“Are you okay?” Emma queried.

“Yes,” Regina resented the questioning, clearly embarrassed that Emma had spotted the momentary weakness, “a small headache, probably from listening to this piffle.”

“Piffle,” Emma nodded and took a deep breath, “fine, I’ll tell Mary Margaret she was right,” she said as she started to walk away.

“Right about what?” Regina questioned after the retreating blonde.

“Oh, it’s nothing,” Emma waved her hand dismissively, “she just said you wouldn’t be able to man up for long enough to face dinner at the apartment.”

Regina stared at the blonde, “do you really think that is going to work?”

“Is it?” Emma asked with a small grin.

“No, it is not,” Regina rested a hand on her hip defiantly.

“Fine, I tried,” Emma shrugged and started to turn around but as she did she noticed Regina’s facial muscles tense as she attempted to contain another wince. Emma paused and looked at the brunette, “are you sure you’re okay?”

“Positively ecstatic,” Regina deadpanned.

“Right, I’ll pick Henry up from Peter’s tomorrow and tell him that you agreed to come to dinner tomorrow evening,” Emma said as she turned on her heel.

“You’ll do no such thing!” Regina cried out as she marched after the blonde and paused on the step of the porch as she remembered she only wore her socks on her feet, “Emma, get back here!”

Emma kept walking, “we’re making chicken,” the blonde called back over her shoulder.

“Miss Swan!” Regina shouted down the path.

“Around six is perfect!” Emma shouted back from the gate, “I’ll pick Henry up from school so just bring your delightful, sociable self!”

Emma got into the Sheriff’s cruiser and slammed the door behind her and quickly drove off before Regina had a chance to say anything else.

Chapter 6

It was six o'clock the next day and there was plenty of activity in the Charming household, David had been told to clean the whole apartment from top to bottom as Regina was coming over and Mary Margaret refused to have Regina judge her domestic abilities.

Henry was on table-setting duty as Mary Margaret thought that if Regina was going to comment on something that would most likely be the victim. Emma was helping with dinner while occasionally looking at her watch, “maybe she’s not coming?”

Mary Margaret shook her head, “she’d call.”

“Yeah, because she’s a picture of good manners,” Emma whispered so Henry wouldn’t hear her.

“She’d call,” Mary Margaret assured just as there was a tentative knock at the door.

All three adults stared at each other, silently indicating that they were very busy in their task and couldn’t possibly open the door. Luckily Henry didn’t notice this and simply turned to open the door, “hey, Mom,” he grinned happily and stepped into an embrace in the doorway.

“How was your sleepover?” Regina asked immediately and Emma smiled at the sweet impatience of a woman who had clearly missed her son.

“It was cool,” Henry beamed happily as he stepped to one side and allowed Regina entry into the apartment. David stepped forward and held out his hand, “can I take your coat?”

“Thank you,” Regina nodded and shrugged out of her black jacket to reveal a simple black cocktail dress.

“I’m glad you could make it,” David smiled as he hung the coat up and placed Regina’s bag on a hook.

“Hope you’re hungry,” Mary Margaret grinned from the kitchen.

“Famished,” Regina admitted and gave Emma a simple nod in greeting.

“It’s Gramps’ month,” Henry told Regina with a smile and Regina looked at a blushing David.

“Yes, so he mentioned,” Regina replied.

“Have you not turned your calendar yet?” Henry asked as he went into the living space to get something.

“No, it quite slipped my mind,” Regina replied.

“Would you like some wine?” David asked cordially.

“No, just water, thank you,” Regina replied.

“Look!” Henry announced as he took a calendar down from the wall and showed it to Regina whilst giggling. Regina glanced at the photograph of David briefly before looking away. In the couple of seconds she looked she noted that the photograph depicted a topless David unsheathing his sword.

“I... see,” Regina coughed as she looked away and David handed her a glass of water.

“I know,” Emma concurred with Regina’s unspoken thought, “and October is one of those thirty one day months too.”

“Hey,” David admonished as he took the calendar from Henry’s hands and looked at the picture, “I’m quite proud of it,” he put the calendar back on the wall and patted his stomach with one hand happily.

Henry was still laughing and Regina swotted him lightly with the back of her hand, “Henry, be nice.”

“It’s fine,” David promised, “he seems to find them all funny.”

“Especially the dwarves,” Mary Margaret pointed out as she plated up the meal.

Henry roared with laughter as he made a move for the calendar to look at the picture himself, only to be stopped by Emma’s outstretched hand on his forehead, “you can laugh at naked dwarves later,” she said and then looked surprised, “I never thought I’d say that,” she shrugged as she placed a salad bowl on the table.

“Please, sit down,” David gestured the table to Regina who was standing around looking and feeling out of place. She looked at the table with confusion, not knowing what the usual seating convention was.

Henry pulled her arm and sat her down at a seat next to him, “are we going riding tomorrow morning?”

“We are,” Regina smiled at him as she settled into her seat.

Mary Margaret and Emma placed serving dishes on the table and the three Charmings joined the Mills duo for the meal. Throughout the meal Emma cast casual glances at Regina to check she had invited the correct ex-Evil Queen to dinner. She was sure there must be a mistake as Regina was quiet, almost meek, she was the picture of politeness and made simple conversation, complimented them on the food and listened to Mary Margaret’s endlessly boring talk on crochet.

After the meal when David was in the bathroom and Henry was helping Mary Margaret to make coffee and clean the plates away Emma leaned forward and casually enquired, “gone off wine or is ours not up to your standard?”

“I...” Regina hesitated, “I’m abstaining from alcohol at the moment.”

“Oh,” Emma examined the brunette’s face, her lie detector could ascertain that the sentence was certainly the truth but she detected there was more to it.

David returned from the bathroom and Emma could see a flash of anxiety in Regina's eyes so Emma decided not to push the conversation any further.

"So, has the calendar been a success?" Regina asked offhandedly, giving Emma confirmation of the brunette's desire for a topic change.

"Yes," David nodded, "we sold out, we might do another print run if there is demand."

Regina raised her eyebrow, clearly impressed, "how many did you print initially?"

"Five hundred," David replied.

"It's the dwarves," Emma winked at Regina as she raised her wine glass to her lips.

Regina blushed and looked down at her water glass but then looked up at the sound of Henry's laughter.

"Henry!" All four adults admonished at the same time.

"Henry," Emma asked as she looked around the apartment, "where's your bag?"

Henry looked around as well and then remembered, "I left it in your car."

Emma stood up and grabbed her keys from a hook, "come on then let's get it now before we forget," Henry frowned at her but didn't question anything and they quickly left the apartment. Once they were down a flight of stairs she spoke, "is everything okay with your Mom?"

"Yeah, why?" Henry asked.

"She seems a little off," Emma admitted.

"Is she?" Henry asked.

“Yeah, she’s not drinking and she’s being quiet... and nice...” Emma opened the door to the street and they both walked outside.

Henry shrugged, “she’s different these days.”

They walked over to the Bug quickly to avoid the chill in the air and Emma unlocked the car, “she’s not given you any indication that anything is wrong?”

Henry shook his head as he grabbed his bag from the backseat of the Bug, “no, why? Do you think she’s up to something because I promise you she isn’t, she’s not evil anymore, Emma, I swear.”

Emma nodded, “I know, Kid, I’m not suggesting that... just... I dunno, just keep an eye on her for me? I want to make sure everything is okay, you know she wouldn’t admit if anything was wrong.”

“You think something is wrong?” Henry looked at her with worried eyes as Emma locked the Bug again.

“Probably not,” Emma assured the young boy, “but just to be safe...”

“Operation Hawk,” Henry smiled.

Emma laughed and put her arm over his shoulder as they walked back to the apartment, “Operation Hawk it is.”

As they opened the street level door Regina appeared with her coat on and Henry’s in her hand, “come along, Henry, it’s time to go home.”

“You’re leaving already?” Emma asked with a frown, “did they say something?”

“No, of course not,” Regina replied as she shoved Henry’s coat into his hands and fumbled in her handbag for her keys, “it just got late and we need to be going.”

“But, Mom, I...” Henry started but paused when Regina glared at him. He knew better than to argue with that look and quickly hugged Emma,

“goodnight, Emma,” he muttered as he trudged towards the car.

“Goodnight, Kid,” Emma called after him and looked at Regina with concern, “are you sur...”

“I’m fine, Miss Swan,” Regina commented as she produced her car keys and looked up at Emma with a softer expression as she took a quick breath, “thank you, for dinner,” she said simply before walking away towards the Mercedes.

Emma turned on her heel and rushed up the stairs to the apartment unsure what she would find and burst in the door to see Mary Margaret and David looking well but as confused as she was.

“Regina...” Emma gestured downstairs.

“We don’t know what happened,” Mary Margaret admitted, “we were fine, discussing Henry’s math improvement and then...”

“I made a stupid comment,” David said and looked forlornly at Mary Margaret.

“No, Honey,” she soothed him.

“What did you say?” Emma frowned.

David pointed at the unlit candles on the dining table, “I realised I hadn’t lit the candles but I couldn’t find the matches either so I just joked and said Regina could conjure a fireball and light them.”

“Literally seen her do it so many times,” Mary Margaret confirmed.

“But she got flustered and then she made a comment that we were testing her to see if she’d use magic and she wouldn’t fall for it,” David continued.

“Was like living in a Yankee Candle store when I was growing up,” Mary Margaret shook her head, “had no idea she was doing it by magic.”

“Then she said she was leaving, I apologised and she said it was getting late and Henry needed to go to bed,” David said.

“It’s quarter to eight,” Emma frowned.

“Exactly,” David shrugged with a sad expression, “I hit a nerve,” he shrugged.

Mary Margaret leaned in to give David a comforting hug and tried to soothe him while Emma looked at the vacated dining chair and the unlit candles and tried to figure out what was going on.

Chapter 7

Henry opened his bedroom door and yawned as he wiped his sleepy eyes and looked around the upstairs hallway, his mother's bedroom door was wide open and he could see the bed had been made.

He poked his head around the corner of the door way and half called half whispered, "Mom?"

When he was satisfied that she wasn't in the bedroom nor the ensuite he stepped into the room and started to look around as he gathered intel for Operation Hawk. Except he had no idea what he was looking for and ended up scrunching his face up as he looked at the bedside table and the curtains with confusion. Everything was normal, nothing was out of place, nothing was unusual in anyway and he began to wonder if Emma was wrong about there being something wrong.

On the way home the previous evening she had seemed upset but Henry had chalked that up to David or Mary Margaret saying something wrong as he wasn't there and that was what everything pointed to. The fact that Regina had attempted to gloss over it and tell him that everything was fine was a good sign, it meant that no permanent damage had been done and he wasn't in danger of being banished from seeing them any time soon.

Upon arrival at the mansion Regina had suggested they watched television together and had even given Henry free reign over the remote control. Hot chocolate and marshmallows were soon supplied and even Regina indulged which, now Henry thought about it, was quite unusual. He realised that Operation Hawk was going to be harder than he first thought.

"Henry?" Regina questioned as she walked into her room and saw him paused in thought at the end of her bed, "are you all right?"

She approached him quickly and with a concerned frown and pulled him close and placed her palm on his forehead to check his temperature. Henry

revelled in the feeling for a moment before pulling back slight to say that he felt fine.

Regina seemed satisfied with that and regarded his sleepwear, “these are getting old, Henry, they don’t fit properly anymore.”

Henry glanced down at his Iron Man ensemble and shrugged, “it’s comfy.”

“I daresay it is, but if they get any shorter they’ll be shorts,” Regina pointed at the trouser legs that were now up to his mid-calf, “Miss Swan must think me incompetent to care for you.”

Henry rolled his eyes at his dramatic mother, “but I like these...”

“Well, we’ll get some more, just in your size,” Regina said.

“Can’t you just sew these ones longer?” Henry pouted as Regina held out an arm to gesture that he follow her downstairs for breakfast.

“Sewing doesn’t work that way Henry, you can’t sew in extra material,” Regina laughed.

“Well, magic them longer then,” he smiled.

Regina cast a sideways glance at him, “you don’t want me doing any magic, remember?”

He nodded silently. This was a topic that had caused friction between the two of them in the early post-curse days, Regina had been keen to show Henry the powers of her magic but Henry had been reticent. After a while it became clear to Henry that Regina was using magic around the house when he was not there but to Henry this was just as bad, he had felt sure that using magic would lead her down the dark path.

A few minor conflicts had crept up where Regina had explained more about the nature of magic and explained that magic itself wouldn’t lead her towards darkness, more her own thoughts and emotions. She explained that she was in a good place and that she felt confident that she would never return to her previous ways. Henry had admitted that magic frightened him a

little, something that Regina had never really considered but upon reflection of her own childhood and her own mother's behaviour she started to understand.

A compromise was reached that Regina could use magic for some things, fixing things, lifting heavy items, delivering his forgotten school lunch box and other minor tasks. Henry didn't complain, in fact he seemed interested, still anxious but fascinated. But the friction remained between them so neither was keen to revisit the topic again.

"What would you like for breakfast?" Regina asked as they walked into the kitchen.

"Pancakes?" Henry asked hopefully.

Regina seemed to consider this for a moment, mentally calculating Henry's diet for the last couple of days and projecting forward before she nodded, "pancakes it is."

An apron was plucked from the hook and Regina covered her riding clothes and began to pick out ingredients from the fridge, "oh, Henry, could you get some paperwork from the study? It's in the red folder on my desk, I need to remember to take it with me to the stables today."

"Sure," Henry said as he left the kitchen and hurried across the cold marble floor of the hallway towards the study. He crossed to the desk and tucked a few errant pieces of paper into a red folder and closed the folder and looked around the desk for more intel for Operation Hawk.

Again everything seemed normal. A burnt down candle and the charity calendar were the only items on the desk that weren't normally there and they were hardly that out of the ordinary. The calendar was still open to September and he looked at Emma's picture and laughed at the prospect of her being arrested, again. He picked the calendar up and turned the page to October and laughed at David's picture and hung the calendar back up on the wall helpfully.

With one last look around the room he shrugged his shoulders to himself and took the red folder back to the kitchen where the smell of pancakes cooking were already starting to fill the hallway.

Chapter 8

At the stables Regina helped Henry to prepare his horse for riding and then sent him out with one of the stable boys who she had of course previously vetted and had faith in his abilities. Henry was disappointed that she was not going to be riding with him but Regina told him she had a few things to do and hopefully she would be joining him later.

Henry rode away from the stables with a small frown on his face, Regina knew that frown only too well. It wasn't a frown of disappointment as she had originally feared, it was a frown of concern and when Henry was concerned by something it usually meant he turned into an investigative journalist on the matter. Regina sighed to herself as she watched him talking with his instructor, she didn't want her little problems to effect Henry and she hoped, for what seemed like the millionth time, that the headaches would soon fade.

Thinking about the headache she had been nursing since the early hours caused her attention to be sharply drawn towards it and she inhaled quickly as she brought her free hand to her forehead for a moment. She looked around and was pleased to note that no one had seen the act and she quickly turned on her heel and approached the stable owner's office.

Bill Trott was a kind and gentle old man who had apparently worked in the Charming stables back in the Enchanted Forest and so he'd had no real knowledge of the Evil Queen. Which was why when Regina arrived one day with Henry, or rather when Henry arrived with Regina in tow in an attempt to get her out of the house, Bill had simply looked at the ex-Mayor with a thoughtful glance before pointing her towards stall sixteen.

Regina had blinked in confusion, having worked herself up nicely and was expecting to fight whoever was in charge in order to give her son the opportunity to ride. Bill then looked at Henry and asked him all the pertinent questions someone would ask a novice and then said that he too should go to stall sixteen.

For a moment Regina had wondered if the stall would be empty and the whole thing would have been a trick but as she approached she saw the most beautiful horse she had ever seen. Black, tall and strong and with a thoughtful glance towards her she briefly thought he may be too much for her to take on, having not ridden for nearly thirty years.

Bill had appeared beside them, “Danny Boy,” he said and the horse responded with a friendly noise, “Danny,” he supposed with a wave of the hand.

“He’s awesome,” Henry had looked at the horse with awe.

“Glad you like him,” Bill said, “because you’re both going to be cleaning his stall and letting him get to know you.”

Henry’s face had ruffled at the thought of getting closer to that smell but Regina had smiled and nodded, she wanted to ease herself back into the activity gently and get to know the horse in the stall who was looking at her with a thoughtful tilt of the head.

A stable boy had watched over them as Regina showed Henry how to care for Danny, they cleaned the stall and then set about gaining Danny’s trust with grooming. When they were done Bill sent Henry off with the stable boy to find a beginner horse and have his first lesson. Bill turned to Regina and regarded her curiously and Regina held her breath while she waited for whatever berating she was about to be issued.

“There’s no feed,” he told her after a few moments, “paperwork,” he shrugged and scratched his head, “it’s a mess of paperwork.”

Regina hadn’t expected a conversation about the administrative issues of running a country stables and simply nodded, “yes, I... imagine there is, in comparison... would you like me to have a look?”

She expected to be immediately shot down, that he would ramble about simply passing the time of day with idle conversation but he nodded and pointed towards the office and she trailed along behind him in surprise. The

stable office was a disaster, mountains of paperwork, equipment, mud, clothing, boots, more mud, medicines and more paperwork.

“Leave it with me,” Regina said as she looked around the mess with an evaluating glance.

Bill looked at her warily but when Regina started picking up pieces of paper by hand and reading them he nodded and left the room. Regina realised he was concerned that she would use magic to clear the mess, the older man not understanding the limitations of magic. If you want a cake that’s fine but if you need to file your tax paperwork then that’s going to be a problem.

He returned an hour later and the office had been tidied, two desks had been discovered under piles of disorganised stuff and he nodded, “you’re hired,” he said with no sense of a joke.

She wasn’t sure why but she started returning to the stables under the pretence of seeing Danny but she often ended up in the stable offices ensuring vet bills were paid, feed was ordered, lessons were corrected booked and muddy boots remained in the boot room next door. Soon after she was spending all of her free time at the stable, either with Danny or Bill, cleaning one of their living spaces for them.

Walking into the office she saw Bill sitting at his desk with a tiny pencil that had been worn down to something barely usable, “good morning,” she greeted.

Bill looked up at her with a friendly nod and enquired “not riding today?”

He looked back at his paperwork and as so many times before Regina wondered if he was making conversation or if he was actually interested.

“Not at the moment,” she replied as she placed her bag on what she had come to think of as her desk, “I wanted to check up on some things,” she pulled the red folder from her bag and placed it on the table and looked over to him to speak but paused when she noticed something.

The damn calendar adorned the wall beside his desk, directly opposite her own desk, and it was still set to September.

“Bill,” she said in a low voice, “is that entirely appropriate?”

Bill looked up at her in confusion before following her gaze to the calendar and the picture of the Sheriff and shrugged, “charity,” he said simply.

“Mmm,” Regina agreed, “however, it is October now,” she pointed out.

“I don’t want to see the Prince’s sword,” he replied seriously without looking up from his crossword he was completing.

“So, we’re to look at September until the end of the month?” Regina sighed.

“You don’t have to look at it,” Bill retorted, “I could get you one and you could look at the Prince?”

“No,” Regina shook her head, “no, that’s quite all right. Besides, I hear they have run out.”

“Not surprised,” Bill muttered.

“Because it’s for charity?” Regina asked with a snort of laughter.

“Because there are a few pretty ladies in there,” Bill said, “the cannery is full of copies...”

Regina shivered slightly at the mention of the place but luckily Bill was doing his usual of not looking at her while he spoke to her.

A knock on the door distracted both of them and Bill looked up through the glass window and nodded at the woman stood on the other side and heaved himself out of his chair, “I’ll be with Mulberry,” he said to Regina as he eased himself out of the room carefully.

Regina started to look through the paperwork she had brought over, she had realised that the stables had never filed any accounts with the town hall and during her time as Mayor she had turned a blind eye. But she knew that couldn't go on so she decided to sort the mess out herself as she was partially responsible.

An hour had gone by and she was deeply engrossed in her work when the door opened again, she expected Bill so didn't even look up but it wasn't until a soft, female cough sounded that she looked up in confusion.

Emma Swan stood in front of her with a smile and Regina found her eyes flitting from the woman in front of her to the calendar on the far wall, "Sheriff," she finally said as she returned to her paperwork.

"So this is where you're hanging out these days," Emma looked around the room with interest.

"Can I help you?" Regina asked as she studied the figures in front of her.

"It's October," Emma said as she noticed the calendar.

"Tell that to Bill," Regina quipped, "apparently you're kinder on the eyes than your father."

Emma turned and looked at Regina who remained firmly looking down at her paperwork, "where's Henry?"

"Out having a lesson," Regina said, "do you need him?"

"No, just curious," Emma said.

"Am I being investigated for something?" Regina asked as she put her pen down and looked up curiously at the Sheriff.

"I didn't know you wore glasses," Emma commented, "they look good."

Regina bristled at the comment and looked back down at her paperwork, "I'm very busy, is there a reason you're here?"

“Do you want to have lunch?” Emma asked out of the blue and Regina’s head snapped up to look at her.

“What?”

“Lunch, the meal in the middle of day,” Emma explained with a laugh as she sat on the edge of Bill’s desk and folded her arms, “I was wondering if you’d like to go to lunch with me. Today. Unless you have plans?”

“Henry and I were going to take advantage of the last few sunny days and have a picnic in the fields,” Regina said.

“What a coincidence,” Emma smiled, “I was thinking of doing the same, we could save some of the grass and sit together.”

“Why are you doing this?” Regina gritted out with annoyance.

“Because something is bothering you and I want to get to the bottom of it,” Emma said seriously.

The lights momentarily dimmed and Emma looked up at the light bulb and then back to the woman opposite her, “old wiring,” Regina explained.

Emma nodded, “you can tell me about it over lunch,” she said finally as she pushed herself up from the desk and walked out of the office before Regina could say another word.

Chapter 9

Half an hour after Emma had rudely invited herself to join Regina and Henry on their picnic and then sauntered out of the office Regina heard the tell-tale sound of her son hurrying towards the office.

The door flew open and Henry burst in with a smile on his face, “that was awesome!”

Regina looked up from her paperwork and raised an eyebrow in question to the boy.

“We did the little jumps today,” Henry announced, “it’s like you said, as long as I know the course and I balance myself properly it’s so easy.”

Regina smiled, “good, I’m glad you’re getting on so well with it, you’ll be doing the full course before you know it.”

“Are you going to ride today?” Henry asked as he sat on the edge of Bill’s desk and caught his breath, “after lunch with Emma, maybe?”

Regina’s eyes narrowed, “so you’ve seen her?”

“Yes, she came and watched me jump,” Henry smiled happily, “she said I was the best at horse jumping she’s ever seen!”

Regina smiled to herself knowing full well that Emma barely knew one end of a horse from the other and that she never spent any time at the stables so wouldn’t have even seen any other jumps.

“She said she was coming on our picnic,” Henry added with a hopeful smile that said he knew full well that Emma had invited herself and was hoping that Regina would agree.

“Yes, it seems she is,” Regina let out a small sigh, “maybe you and she could go to the car and unpack and find a suitable location?”

Regina reached into her bag beside the desk and handed Henry the car keys, “just not too far away this time,” she said remember the last time Henry had looked for a perfect picnic spot and had ended up a twenty minute walk away.

Henry grabbed the keys and nodded his understanding and turned around, “Mom?”

“Yes, dear?” Regina asked.

“Why is the calendar still on September?” Henry asked as he pointed to Emma’s picture on the wall.

“Mister Trott,” Regina gestured to Bill’s desk, “is in charge of that calendar.”

“Oh,” Henry said with a shrug as he left the office, “don’t be long, Mom...”

“I’ll be there shortly,” Regina promised and watched as he left and walked away from the office and towards the exit of the stables. Regina looked over at the calendar again and felt herself blush as Emma’s striking green eyes met hers with that mix of innocence and determination. With a glance to the other photograph, the side shot mugshot, Regina smiled at the carefree and happy vision of the blonde and wondered if that was why Henry liked her so much.

Regina never saw Emma like that but then she presumed that, because of their history, Emma was always on guard around her. If Emma ever laughed it was at one of her own jokes, yes she smiled but not in the relaxed way she was in the photograph. And now Emma seemed to care about Regina’s well-being, now the troublesome and interfering young woman was hanging around and asking awkward questions, probably enlisting Henry’s assistance too.

With a sigh Regina stood up and picked up her bag and left the office to join the two of them for lunch. She was determined to ensure that Emma left the lunch with the understanding that nothing was wrong with her and that would hopefully be the end of the matter.

In a nearby field Henry and Emma unwrapped luxurious soft grey blankets that Emma would usually be afraid to sit on, never mind lay on the grass, and opened the two large picnic hampers that they had found in the trunk of the car. Emma had her own lunch, a bottle of cheap cola and a cheese sandwich wrapped in foil and opened the hampers with interest.

“There’s enough food in here to feed an army,” Emma announced.

“Mom likes to prepare food,” Henry agreed, “I’m gonna be so fat when I grow up.”

Emma laughed, “your Mom’s slim, she can’t be eating all of this.”

“No, she makes it and then feeds it to me,” Henry smiled, “she hardly eats anything, especially lately.”

Emma raised an eyebrow, “what do you mean especially lately?”

Henry shrugged, “since I’ve been back home, I guess?”

“Since Tamara and Greg left town?” Emma clarified.

“Since they got away,” Henry corrected as he unpacked some food, “but, yeah, could have been longer though, I didn’t really see her much before then,” he said with a trace of guilt in his tone.

Emma sat on the blanket and looked at Henry who was doing his best to avoid eye contact, “Henry, you know I did everything I could to find Tamara and Greg, right?”

“Sure,” Henry shrugged.

After Emma and Regina had stopped the trigger Emma instructed Mary Margaret to get the brunette home and rest while Emma set out to find Tamara and Greg with David. Before long they were in a high-speed chase through the woods outside the town, Tamara and Greg in Greg’s rental car and David and Emma in the police cruiser.

As the approached the town line Emma skidded the cruiser to a stop and told David to get out the car, fearing what would happen to him if he crossed the dreaded orange line. The second the door was closed again Emma wheel-spun as she slammed her foot down to get after them and continued the pursuit.

Emma hadn't realised exactly what had happened to Regina at first, she knew that Greg had kept her at the cannery but following that she was too busy grieving Neal's death to find out what had taken place. After that all hell broke lose with the discovery of the curse trigger and it wasn't until David and Emma were in the cruiser chasing the pair that David had the time to tell Emma what had transpired at the cannery.

Although she'd never admit it to anyone Emma knew that the knowledge of what had happened to Regina had ignited the fury within Emma that persuaded her to take stupid risks in order to catch up with the two criminals. She followed them off road, sirens blaring before tearing through farms and crossing roads without hardly a glance for oncoming traffic.

It was sheer luck that Greg managed to navigate around the giant articulated lorry that Emma swerved to avoid causing the police cruiser to roll several times leaving it and her upside down in a ditch. It took five hours for her to walk back to town and ask David to come and get her from the town line.

Since then the topic had been closed to Emma on the rare occasion she had attempted to bring it up with either Regina or Henry.

“Henry,” Emma tried again, “I...” she paused as she felt a presence approaching them and turned to see Regina walking towards them with a smug look as she regarded Emma's foil-encased lunch.

“I see you're ready to dine like a princess, Miss Swan,” Regina commented with a grin.

Chapter 10

The grin doesn't meet her eyes, Emma thought to herself as she nodded and held up her foil square of flattened sandwiches, "cheese," she informed Regina with a grin.

Regina placed her bag on the ground and lowered herself to kneel on the blanket and pulled over a hamper and opened it to reveal a coolbag and handed it to Emma, "there's chicken mayonnaise, tuna and cucumber and salt beef, pick what you like."

Emma smiled at the unexpected gesture and opened the coolbag and looked at the gourmet sandwiches within.

Henry was munching happily on something that he had found in the other hamper and Emma realised that any conversation was going to be down to her, "so," she said as she opened the plastic wrapping of the most perfect salt beef sandwich to ever grace her presence, "the stables..."

Regina picked up a red apple for the hamper and took a small bite as she looked at Emma for her to continue.

"You... enjoy it out here?" Emma struggled to find anything sensible to say.

"Mom loves to ride," Henry pointed out with a smile at the brunette.

"And I love to watch you learn to ride just as much," Regina smiled back.

Emma took a bite of her sandwich as she decided what topic to try to mangle next but all thought of conversation flew out of her mind when she tasted the delicious sandwich and found herself moaning out loud in appreciation.

Regina looked at her with surprise as Emma murmured, through a mouthful of sandwich, "oh, my, God, Regina this is delicious."

“It’s the mayonnaise,” Henry provided helpfully, “Mom makes flavoured mayonnaises.”

Emma nodded as she realised it was the delicious sauce that was make the ordinary looking sandwich into an event, “it’s amazing.”

“It’s a sandwich,” Regina told her plainly as she took another small bite of her apple.

“You should come over to dinner,” Henry said, “Mom cooks the best food ever and there’s always too much!”

Emma didn’t even have to look at Regina to know there was a look of horror on her face at the mere thought of just the three of them struggling through dinner, “Kid, you can’t just go inviting people over to dinner and forcing your mom to cook for them.”

“Miss Swan...” Regina attempted to interrupt, presumably to pretend she didn’t mind but Emma wasn’t having it.

“If Regina wants to invite me over for dinner then that’s entirely up to her,” Emma said sternly to Henry before looking at a shocked Regina, “and there’s no pressure to do so.”

“Sorry Emma, sorry Mom,” Henry said as he realised the awkward situation he had put them both in.

“So, what’s the name of your horse?” Emma asked Henry in an effort to change the subject and take the pressure off of Regina.

“Athena,” Henry smiled.

“Goddess of war,” Emma commented.

“And wisdom,” Regina added quickly.

“Is that so?” Emma asked as she demolished the sandwich.

“Yes,” Regina said, “as is often the case she is only remembered for the worst of her, she was considered the Goddess of wisdom, courage, inspiration, justice and, finally, war. Guess which one stuck,” she looked at Emma meaningfully.

Regina looked at Henry, “she was also known for her mathematical abilities.”

Henry smirked at Regina’s none too subtle quip as to Henry’s recent grasp of algebra.

“So, she was a strategist?” Emma asked thoughtfully, “to be a warrior you would need those things.”

“Precisely, but time has served to reduce her to the Goddess of War,” Regina sighed.

“She likes apples,” Henry said in an attempt to lighten to mood and Regina smiled as she took another bite of her own apple.

“Indeed she does, Henry,” Regina mumbled.

“Have you ever ridden a horse?” Henry asked Emma as he dug around in a hamper for a drink.

“No, never had the opportunity,” Emma said.

“You should start, it’s great,” Henry said excitedly.

“I think I’m a bit too old to learn,” Emma admitted, “if I fall and break something it won’t heal like it would if you fell.”

“He’s not going to fall,” Regina said firmly.

“But if he did,” Emma added, “the point still stands.”

“Mom would fix me,” Henry said with a shrug causing Regina to look at him in confusion.

“What do you mean, Henry?” Regina hesitantly queried.

Henry took several long gulps of juice before responding, “just that if I fell and broke something you’d fix it, you know, with magic...”

“Henry, you can’t rely on magic to fix your ailments, you have to be careful, you are being careful aren’t you?” Regina’s voice rose an octave and Emma noticed the slight signals of the brunette’s distress.

“Yeah, sure,” Henry said casually, “but it’s like when I burnt my hand on the stove months ago, you fixed it.”

Regina regarded Henry with a deadly serious expression as she gently told him, “Henry, magic can’t heal all wounds and it mustn’t be relied on. You must be careful, you can’t rely on my being there if something goes wrong.”

Emma felt like an intruder on a private conversation and gently nibbled on the apple turnover she’d discovered in the hamper as she watched the mother and son with interest. Henry was regarding Regina with understanding and yet some concern, Emma was reminded of the time when Regina was going to sacrifice herself to contain the trigger device. Henry was giving Regina the same look now as he had given her then before he put his bottle of drink down and quickly crossed over to where Regina sat and embraced her tightly, “I promise I’ll be careful, Mom,” he told her resolutely.

He sat back a little and frowned, “you’re cold.”

“Just a little chill, I think we left it a little late in the year to have our last picnic,” Regina told him with a smile, “I’m fine.”

But it was too late, Henry was up and already walking away, “I’ll get your cardigan from the car,” he told her over his shoulder.

“Henry, I’m fine, come back and eat your lunch,” Regina told him but Henry was already jogging back towards the stables.

Regina looked back at Emma, suddenly uncomfortable that the blonde had been there to witness the scene between her and Henry, “he’s a good boy,”

she said simply.

“He is,” Emma agreed, “the best,” she looked at the brunette thoughtfully, “I’d offer you my jacket but I know you hate it.”

“I’m really not that cold,” Regina rolled her eyes, “and I don’t hate it,” she looked at the red leather jacket, “I just wouldn’t wear it myself.”

Without warning Emma reached forward and quickly brought the back of her fingers up to rest lightly on Regina’s cheek and she frowned, “you’re freezing, Regina.”

Regina pulled away from the unwelcome touch, “I’m fine,” she groused.

“Your skin is freezing,” Emma told her unquestionably, “if you don’t feel cold then you must have a fever.”

“Why are you so concerned with my well-being?” Regina demanded sternly.

“Why does it bother you that I am?” Emma retorted.

“Because I’m not used to people giving a damn!” Regina replied curtly.

“Well then get used to it!” Emma snapped back.

The half-eaten apple in Regina’s hand suddenly started to vibrate and Regina dropped it in shock, as it fell to the blanket it turned to dust and vanished. Regina let out a small sigh, she was so hoping to get through the lunch without any problems but now Emma was staring at her with an open mouth.

“Regina?” Emma questioned, “w-why did you do that?”

“Because I felt like it,” Regina answered shortly.

“No, you were surprised, you didn’t know that was going to happen...” Emma stared at Regina with confusion, “Regina, what’s wrong?”

“Nothing is wrong, Miss Swan!” Regina said as she stood up and fussed with her straightening her clothes, “if you have finished eating lunch then Henry and I really must be going!”

“Mom?” Henry asked as he returned with the cardigan in his hand, his cheeks were red from the jog to and from the car park and his eyes looked intently between the two women to try to ascertain what had happened.

“Henry, I... I have to make some calls that I forgot earlier, finish your lunch with Miss Swan and then pack everything away,” Regina told him as she gratefully took the cardigan and put it on and wrapped it around herself tightly with her arms folded defensively across her stomach, “I’ll see you soon,” she told him as she stalked away from the picnic.

Chapter 11

Henry turned to Emma, “what did you do?”

“I don’t know,” Emma replied as she watched Regina stalking away from them.

Henry stared at her expectantly and when Emma looked blankly at him he sighed, “go and fix it.”

“Henry, I don’t know what I did wrong, I don’t know how I’m supposed to fix it...” Emma told him with a wave of the hand.

“Figure it out,” Henry said as he started packing away the picnic things and deliberately ignored her.

Emma looked at the young boy and then at the retreating woman and sighed as she turned on her heel and started to follow Regina. The brunette had an impressive head start so Emma start to run after her, pretty sure that calling the woman would have absolutely no effect.

By the time Emma caught up to the ex-Mayor she was sat at her desk pretending to be engrossed in paperwork.

“Regina,” Emma started.

“Go away, Miss Swan,” Regina said quietly and with exasperation rather than the anger that Emma had been expecting.

“Not until you tell me what is going on,” Emma said, “Henry...”

“You are not taking my son from me!” Regina roared as she slammed the pen down on the desk and the light above them began to flicker violently.

Emma held her hands up to calm the woman as she looked warily at the lightbulb above them in fear that it was about to explode and rain hot

fragments of glass down on them, “I absolutely have no intention of taking Henry from you, you’re his mother,” Emma said with a calm she didn’t feel.

Emma lowered her eyes from the lightbulb to Regina and gasped, “Regina? You’re bleeding...”

But Regina didn’t notice nor care about the small trickle of blood that had exited her nostril and was trailing down her lip, she looked panicked and like she was attempting to take deep breaths while in the middle of a panic attack.

It was then that Emma realised the room was vibrating slightly, and the lightbulb not the only electrical device that was behaving peculiarly and out in the stables she heard a horse or two whinny in distress.

“Regina?” Emma said softly as she stepped around the desk slowly with her hands still up and approached the brunette, “how can I help? What do you need me to do?”

Regina wasn’t responding, she seemed too intent on trying to stop whatever was happening as a tear escaped her eye and she fought for control.

Emma put her hand on Regina’s upper arm in a comforting gesture and slowly turned the brunette to face her. With the room still vibrating and the sounds of things falling off of shelves Emma looked at Regina intently and waited for troubled brown eyes to look up and make eye contact.

When they finally did Emma smiled reassuringly, “I’m right here,” she said with confidence as her other hand rested on Regina’s other upper arm and she held the brunette at arm’s length.

Slowly the vibrating seemed to stop, the light flickered until it returned to normal and Regina’s taut body relaxed and her breathing started to return to normal. Emma quickly plucked a tissue from the box on Regina’s desk with one hand while the other guided her to sit down in the chair behind her.

Regina’s hand shook as she took the offered tissue and brought it up to beneath her nose and then examined the tissue with a frown as she saw blood

and then folded the tissue in half and continued to dab under her nose.

“What is going on? And don’t say that you’re fine,” Emma told her softly as she knelt beside her and grabbed another tissue and moved Regina’s hand away from her face and gently wiped the blood up for her.

Regina sat there stony-faced with no intention of replying and Emma sighed, “Regina, this isn’t a trick, I just want to help you. You’re suffering with headaches, you’re freezing cold to the touch, you’ve had a nosebleed and you don’t seem to be able to control your magic. I know I’m probably not your go-to girl for this kind of thing but I’m all you’ve got, please, let me help you.”

“It’s passing,” Regina said softly as she looked down at the tissue she was clutching in her hand.

“What’s passing?” Emma asked gently.

“It’s only now and then that I can’t control my magic like that,” Regina explained, “usually it’s just an absence of magic, it’s getting better but it’s taking time. I assure you that Henry is perfectly safe.”

“I’m not worried about Henry,” Emma said honestly, “I’m worried about you.”

“Me?” Regina looked down at the blonde with confusion, “why would you worry about me?”

“Because, believe it or not, I’m... I dunno, I’m a human being, I give a shit about others,” Emma said with exasperation, “why would anyone not worry about you after that?”

Regina snorted a small laugh, “it’s not been my experience that people worry too much about what happens to me... oh...” she held up a hand to her head and leaned forward as a piercing headache took hold of her.

“That’s it,” Emma said as she grabbed the tissue from Regina’s hand and placed them both in the bin, “I’m taking you to the hospital.”

“No!” Regina barked and the light flickered dangerously, “do not take me to the hospital, no doctors, promise me, Emma, promise me!”

“I promise,” Emma quickly replied, but not through fear of the lightbulb bursting but through a need to comfort the suddenly terrified woman in front of her, “at least let me help you home?”

“Henry mustn’t know,” Regina said through a wince as she held the side of her head in pain.

“We’ll tell him you have a bug, hence the chill,” Emma agreed, “we’ll get you home and then you can tell me what is going on, okay?”

Regina didn’t have any strength left in her to confirm nor deny her plan of action once she got back home and she also didn’t have enough strength to fight when Emma stood up and pulled Regina gently to her feet. She wrapped Regina’s arm around her shoulder and put a supportive arm around the brunette’s waist and gave her a reassuring smile, “I promise we’ll get through whatever this together, okay?”

Chapter 12

Emma opened the kitchen cupboard door where Henry told her the tea was kept in Regina's impressive kitchen and looked at the selection of teas with a frown, "er, Henry?"

Henry stood beside her with his arms folded, "I'll tell you which tea she'll want and how to make it properly if you tell me what is going on."

Emma looked up at the kitchen door nervously, she and Henry had helped Regina to the comfortable looking sofa in her downstairs study and she looked like she was in no state to get up again but still she worried. Emma really didn't want to see Regina's temper if she thought that Emma had betrayed her trust and told Henry what she knew, which was admittedly very little.

"Henry," Emma pleaded, "I... I don't want to betray a confidence, I hardly know anything but what I do know I've been sworn to secrecy about and your mom and I are already on shaky ground so I don't want to make it worse, you know?"

Henry scrunched up his face in understanding laced with annoyance, "she always thinks she's got to protect me," he told Emma with a sigh, "I'm not a kid anymore."

Emma nodded, "she's your mother, Henry, it's got nothing to do with your age. She'll be exactly the same when you're twenty-five. She loves you and with love comes a need to protect people."

"Apple and cinnamon," Henry pointed to a red box of tea, "splash of cold water, then don't let the kettle fully boil, bag in for two minutes."

She smiled, "thanks, Kid."

"Is she okay?" Henry asked Emma as she picked a teabag out of the box and put it in the mug that Henry had already told her was the correct one.

“I don’t know, but I intend to find out,” Emma told him seriously as she added the dash of cold water to the mug and flipped the switch on the kettle.

“It’s the headaches isn’t it?” Henry pushed.

“Does she have them often?” Emma probed.

“She pretends she doesn’t after I mentioned it once,” Henry explained, “but, yeah, she has them all the time. She takes pills for them when I’m not looking.”

“What pills?” Emma asked.

Henry shrugged, “her medicine cabinet is full of them.”

“Has she been to the doctor?” Emma asked as she looked up at the kitchen door again to check the brunette was not there.

“She’s never been to the doctor,” Henry said seriously, “she gets upset if I ever mention it.”

Emma frowned, “does she have a problem with Doctor Whale?”

Henry smiled, “yeah, but that’s not the reason, she doesn’t like any doctor.”

Emma was about to reply when she realised the kettle was nearing the end of its cycle and quickly lifted it from the base and poured steaming hot water into the mug.

“She won’t like it,” Emma started with a sigh, “but I think you need to be there when I talk to her about what’s going on. She can’t keep this a secret from you...”

“I can do my sad face,” Henry suggested, “that usually works.”

“Try me with your sad face,” Emma looked at him with interest.

Henry looked up at her with big eyes and tilted his head to one side and opened his mouth slightly in an attempt to look forlorn.

Emma regarded him for a moment before shaking her head, “that’s terrible, does she fall for that?”

Henry shrugged and pointed to the cup, “bag.”

“Oh,” Emma grabbed a spoon and quickly rescued the teabag from the cup and threw it in the bin.

A few moments later Henry opened the door to the study as Emma followed him in with a tray complete with tea for Regina, juice for Henry and a small plate of biscuits. Regina was curled up on the sofa with a hand to her head and narrowing eyes, she frowned when she saw Henry take a seat next to her, “Henry? I thought you were going to play on your game?”

Emma sat on the arm chair opposite the sofa and watched as Henry put his determined face on.

“I wanna stay,” he told Regina seriously, “I wanna know what’s happening with you.”

“Henry, I’m fine,” Regina smiled, “I just have a bug, like Emma told you.”

Emma looked at Henry and saw him start to put on his sad face, “but Mom,” he whispered, “I’m worried about you, I don’t want to hear anymore lies.”

It was all Emma could do not to laugh, especially at the lip wobbling at the end and she looked at Regina to share the joke but noticed that Regina, ex-Evil Queen, had completely fallen for it. Tears were building in her eyes and she raised her arm for Henry to embrace her as the other hand was brought up to stroke his hair, “oh, Henry, I’m sorry.”

Emma shook her head, these fairy tale characters were a whole new level of ridiculous sometimes.

“Okay,” Emma said, “so, what is happening?”

Henry pulled back gently but grabbed a hold of Regina's hand and looked at her with a comforting smile.

"As I said to you at the stables," Regina addressed Emma, "it's passing."

Emma nodded even though she didn't believe the statement, "okay, but what is passing, you said that you were having trouble controlling your magic?"

Regina stiffened and looked at Henry tentatively but all the boy did was frown and Emma realised that the older woman was worried about how Henry would react to that news.

"I wouldn't say trouble controlli..." Regina began to defend herself, clearly concerned about how Henry would take the news.

"Regina," Emma interrupted, "there were a couple of small incidents that you admitted you weren't in control of," the blonde decided to play down the minor earthquake and electrical disturbances, "nothing major but still something is up..."

"Like when the mug broke?" Henry asked Regina softly.

Regina looked from Emma to Henry in fear of where the questioning was going but then Henry laced his fingers through Regina's and held her hand tightly as he continued, "what can we do to help?"

It seemed that that was the turning point, when Regina understood that she was surrounded by concerned allies and not people she needed to defend herself too. A small, unasked-for sob escaped her mouth and her eyes filled with unshed tears.

"There are... times," she explained gently, "where my magic... where... where I'm not quite in control. But it's not dangerous, I'd never hurt you," she turned to Henry and held his face with the hand that was not laced with his before turning her head towards Emma, "I'd never hurt anyone. Not anymore."

Emma quickly nodded, “I know, don’t worry, I know you’re not trying to hurt anyone.”

“Why is this happening to you?” Henry asked with anxiety.

“It,” Regina paused and closed her eyes for a moment, “it... started happening a few months ago.”

“When?” Emma asked, she got the impression that Regina was being deliberately vague.

As Regina looked at her with sad brown eyes filled with unshed tears that were about to find their freedom on her cheeks Emma realised she was right and Regina had attempted to hold back.

“The cannery,” Regina whispered quietly.

Emma felt a rush of emotions, anger at what had happened to the brunette as well as her inability as supposed Sheriff to either find her in time or capture her torturers. Sadness that Regina had been dealing with whatever was happening to her alone for months. Fear at what this could mean for the brunette and for Henry.

After her failed attempt to capture Greg and Tamara Emma had been back to the cannery to catalogue and clear the crime scene, although she had never seen exactly what took place there she still couldn’t shake the image of that terrible room from her mind. Mary Margaret’s heart wrenching description of what state Regina had been in when they had found her along with the image of the room had been enough for Emma to construct various horrific images in her mind as to what actually happened that day.

Emma realised Henry was speaking and woke herself from her distracting thoughts and looked towards Regina who seemed to be formulating an answer.

“It didn’t happen straight away, or maybe it did,” Regina said as she thought about that period of time, “I don’t know. When I was trying to contain the trigger I wasn’t aware that anything was wrong but then I was still,” she

looked at Henry and Emma could tell she was thinking of another way to say whatever she had planned to say, “feeling the effects of what had happened.”

“And after that?” Henry asked with concern in his tone.

“After that I began to realise that things were not quite right,” Regina admitted, “I was still suffering from the headaches and...” she paused and Emma realised she was again censoring herself for Henry’s sake, “magic... magic is emotion.”

Henry nodded his understanding and Regina continued, “I began to find that my magic would... be unpredictable when I was emotional. And with the pain I was feeling I was sometimes becoming emotional.”

“And not being in control of your magic made it worse,” Henry finished with an understanding squeeze of Regina’s hand that showed him wise beyond his years.

“So,” Emma questioned, “you’ve been having headaches and,” she looked Regina in the eye as she almost imperceptibly brushed her hand against her nose, “stuff since then?”

The light in the ceiling and a desk lamp on Regina’s desk suddenly turned on as Regina looked at Emma with a deadly serious expression, “I am not going to see a doctor about it.”

Chapter 13

The lights in the study glowed brighter and brighter and suddenly the fireplace sprang to life with a burst of fire as Regina began to hyperventilate while staring daggers at Emma.

“Mom, it’s okay,” Henry told Regina urgently, “it’s okay, I promise...”

The lights flickered off and Regina blinked a few times as she seemed to suddenly realise what was happening and looked at Henry with a sorrowful expression, “oh, Henry,” she pulled him into an embrace, “I’m so sorry, I didn’t mean... I don’t...”

“It’s okay,” Henry assured her as he looked sideways at Emma while Regina crushed the boy to her, “you don’t have to go, it’s okay.”

Henry gently pulled away and looked at Regina thoughtfully, “but I wanna know why.”

Regina’s breath hitched and she looked at Emma for support but the blonde just held her hands up to show that she had nothing to do with it. Emma was so relieved that Henry was there and taking the lead because she was pretty sure she would have been barbequed by now, whether or not Regina would actively have wanted to.

“Mom...” Henry pushed softly.

Regina nodded, “Henry, could you go and get your history book from last year?”

Henry frowned and Regina patted his knee lightly, “please, Henry.”

He looked from Regina to Emma and then got up and quickly left the room in search of his textbook.

Regina let out a shaky breath and refused to make eye contact with Emma and attempted to dry her eyes with a tissue without ruining her mascara.

“I’m sorry,” Emma eventually said, so quietly that Regina almost missed it.

Regina looked up at the blonde in confusion, certain she had misheard, “pardon?”

“I said I’m sorry,” Emma repeated seriously.

“You’re sorry?” Regina was still puzzled, “why are you sorry?”

“That you’ve been going through this alone, that I didn’t notice,” Emma explained with a tense expression.

“Why would you notice?” Regina asked, though it wasn’t unkindly meant, “you’re not responsible for me.”

“Maybe not but you’re Henry’s mother and I... I think of us as friends, kinda,” Emma hesitated to admit the fact that she considered Regina one of the few people in Storybrooke she could actually talk to and understand.

Clearly the whole notion was a shock to Regina, “friends?”

“Well, not besties or anything but, yeah, friends, I see you four times a week minimum, we talk, sort of,” Emma tried to explain but her sentence soon drifted off at Regina’s confused expression.

“And,” Regina was clearly trying to wrap her head around the concept, “you’re sorry?”

Emma looked like she wanted to retaliate but she bit her lip for a moment before carefully replying, “I wish I had noticed something was up sooner... in that way, I’m sorry. I suppose I’m also sorry because... well... because I feel guilty...”

“Guilty?” Regina’s confusion at the apology was nothing compared to her bewilderment at Emma feeling guilt, “you haven’t done anything...”

“Exactly,” Emma said agitatedly, “Greg nearly killed you, if Henry hadn’t mentioned that he was worried about you I probably wouldn’t have even looked for you. Mary Margaret went to Gold and found you by using that weird spell... I... I wouldn’t have found you,” she admitted quietly and as if for the first time she was saying it aloud she slumped forward and put her head in her hands, “I wouldn’t have found you. I probably wouldn’t have even looked.”

The admission weight heavily on Emma but Regina simply shrugged, “why would you?”

Emma looked up in surprise, “because I’m the Sheriff,” she answered, “it’s my job to look after all the citizens and that includes you.”

“The Evil Queen?” Regina drawled with a smirk, “oh please, you have no such requirement when it comes to me...”

“Yes, I do,” Emma said firmly and glanced at the door to check Henry hadn’t returned yet, “when I think about what he did to you...”

“It was no less than I deserved,” Regina replied softly.

“No one deserves that,” Emma replied resolutely.

“Emma, if that technology had been available during my reign I would have used it too, don’t tell me I didn’t deserve it, I deserved so much more,” Regina rationalised.

The blonde wanted to deny it to say anything but she found the words wouldn’t come as she wondered, not for the first time, about Regina’s time as the Evil Queen. But Emma knew that the Queen and the woman in front of her were different people, she knew that Regina had come a long way in redeeming herself and she knew that the curse was Gold’s curse, not Regina’s.

Henry entered the room with a school textbook in his hand, “did you really want this or did you just want to get rid of me?”

Despite her headache Regina smiled at that and gently shook her head, “I want you and Emma to look at it,” she explained and Henry perched on the arm of the chair that Emma was sat on.

“Do you remember when you were studying and you asked me for help with an essay?” Regina asked Henry.

Henry frowned, “which one?”

“The time I said I couldn’t help,” Regina prompted.

Henry suddenly seemed to understand and he nodded, “you said you’d help me but then you said you were busy,” he flipped through the book to the page he’d been on that evening.

“And I told you to ask Miss Swan the next day when you saw her,” Regina added.

“Oh, I remember, it was the first time you asked me to help with your homework,” Emma looked at Henry with a smile.

“And the last time because you ended up doing most of it for him,” Regina said with a roll of her eyes.

Henry had opened the page to nineteenth century surgery and began to flip through the module.

“The old medicine stuff,” Emma said with a grin, “you think the hospital is like this?”

The second the flippant words were out of Emma’s mouth she wished she could take them back as the fire in the fireplace soared up the chimney and Emma swallowed hard.

Regina seemed to be doing her best to calm herself down by controlling her breathing and keeping her eyes tightly closed.

Emma was about to say something else when Henry suddenly whispered in understanding, “it... it was like this...” he pointed to a page filled with

illustrations of torturous looking medical procedures, “in the Enchanted Forest,” he said as he looked up at Regina before dumping the book on Emma’s lap and crossing over to sit beside his mother and wrap his arms around her.

Looking down at the pictures Emma remembered details of the module, the drilling into the skull to relieve headaches, the needles through the eyes to cure depression, bloodletting and children’s soothing syrups that consisted mainly of morphine. Nineteenth century medicine was nothing short of barbaric with surgeons itching to use a blunt and rusty saw to cut off anything that ailed anyone.

Piecing things together Emma remembered her own time in the Enchanted Forest, the first thing she had thought was that it looked like the old days, like something out of a history book. Despite the presence of magic it seemed that everything was simpler and old-fashioned.

Emma looked up at Regina in suddenly, horrific understanding that Regina had, at some point in her time in the Enchanted Forest, been to see whatever their version of a doctor was and had been subjected to some kind of medical treatment that would now be considered barbaric.

Emma slammed the book shut and took a deep breath, she had no idea what the next steps would be but she knew she wasn’t going to allow Regina to take them alone.

Chapter 14

Emma had excused herself to the kitchen under the pretence of getting herself a drink and stood staring at the array of tea available in Regina's cupboard. Emma wasn't even that big a fan of flavoured tea but she just needed to get away for a few minutes to collect her thoughts and work on a plan. Except that plan wasn't coming, her brain was throwing out nothing of use only fear at what an uncontrollable Regina might look like and guilt from the knowledge of what Greg's abuse had done.

"I recommend the strawberry," Regina's voice sounded from behind her.

"I don't like tea," Emma said as she turned around.

Regina cocked her head to one side and then asked, "I could make you coffee?"

"I'm not thirsty," Emma replied with a shrug.

"Ah," Regina said in understanding.

"You say that it's getting better, but it's not is it?" Emma asked.

Regina stared at the blonde for a few moments before she slowly shook her head, "it's been getting worse of late. Well, the headaches have been getting worse which in turn makes the... situation... with my magic more difficult."

Regina was leaning against the far side worktop with her arms folded defensively over her chest looking at Emma with a neutral expression.

"The nose bleed?" Emma asked hesitantly, almost afraid of the answer.

"That was a first," Regina admitted, "I... was sure you were going to take Henry from me."

“Well,” Emma gave a small smile, “before you go all nuclear again, let me be very clear, I’m not taking Henry from you and I’m not going to force you to see a doctor. Although I think you need to.”

Regina gave a small smirk, “go nuclear?”

“Let’s just say I have a new found respect for your magical abilities,” Emma said, “I get the feeling you could extinguish my life with a single thought. Where’s Henry?”

Regina paled at the insinuation that she would kill the blonde so easily, “I wouldn’t hurt you.”

“I’m not saying you would, intentionally,” Emma explained.

Regina nodded slowly, “Henry has gone to his room, he said he wants to play on his game but the twenty questions regarding my health before he left leaves me to believe he is going to research my condition on the Internet.”

“That would make for some interesting search history,” Emma mumbled, “what have you been doing to try to cure the headaches?”

“Pills,” Regina shrugged, “I’ve tried a few brands but none are that effective though they do take the edge off.”

“How often do you take them?” Emma asked, already fearful of the answer, she couldn’t imagine Regina would be someone to take much notice of safety warnings.

Regina shrugged and Emma let out a sigh and counted ten in her head, “vaguely?”

Regina rolled her eyes, “I don’t know, sometimes a box a day?”

“How big’s the box?” Emma asked with worry.

Regina sighed and cross the kitchen and opened a drawer and pulled out a box of medicine, Emma caught a glimpse of a number of boxes in the drawer as Regina thrust the box into the blonde’s hand.

“Twelve in a pack,” Emma said as she read the back, “and you’re getting through a pack a day?”

“It says to take two at a time,” Regina pointed out the line on the box.

“No more than four times a day!” Emma argued as she pointed to the next line.

“So?” Regina sighed.

“So that’s eight, you’re taking twelve. A day,” Emma pointed out, “Regina these things can kill your liver.”

Regina reached up to take the box from Emma but Emma held it out of reach, “oh, no, no way,” Emma said.

“For someone who just commented I could end their life with a thought you’re very brave,” Regina pointed out as she reached up to attempt to grab the box from Emma’s hand.

“Are you hooked on these things?” Emma asked seriously as she took a few steps away from Regina.

“No,” Regina shook her head and stopped reaching for the box, “I’m just sick of the constant headaches.”

Emma regarded her for a moment, “but they aren’t really helping?”

“No, I suppose not,” Regina conceded.

“So... you’ll stop taking them for a while?” Emma asked hopefully.

Regina looked at Emma with exasperation, “if it means that much to you,” she jested.

“It does,” Emma said seriously, “there are other ways to get rid of headaches, ways that don’t shut your liver down.”

“For example?” Regina asked.

“Yoga, drinking more water, not drinking caffeine, stretching, massage,” Emma listed.

“You seem quite the expert,” Regina commented.

“A... friend used to suffer with migraines,” Emma replied with a shrug, “but I do know that medicating yourself to the eyeballs isn’t going to help.”

Regina sighed and leaned back on the worktop as Emma threw the box of pills back onto the worktop with a sigh of her own.

“You’re probably not going to like this,” Emma started.

“Then may I recommend that you don’t say it?” Regina tried.

“But maybe we need to see Gold?” Emma finished.

“Why on earth would I want to see that insipid imp?” Regina looked affronted.

“Because something is up with your magic and he might know what, he might be able to help,” Emma pointed out.

“I don’t want him to know,” Regina said quietly.

“You didn’t want anyone to know and look how well that was going,” Emma commented, “now you have two people who are trying to help you rather than you dealing with this on your own.”

“I don’t want him to know my weakness,” Regina informed the blonde.

“I know you two have your history,” Emma continued, “but I also know you have worked together as well. You’ve been to him for help before...”

Regina sighed and fidgeted and Emma held her hand up, “okay, it’s just a suggestion, think on it,” she said calmly, hoping that would pre-empt any explosion that might come from the brunette.

“By the way,” Emma suddenly remembered, “Henry wanted me to ask you if it would be okay if he goes out with Ruby tomorrow to sell more calendars?”

“I thought they’d all sold out?” Regina asked.

“They did but Ruby thinks we’ll get enough orders to justify another print run,” Emma shrugged and looked at Regina who was busy analysing the pattern on a distant tea towel, “so, can he go?”

Regina looked up at the blonde and nodded, “yes, of course, if more people really want to see naked dwarves then who am I to stand in their way?”

Emma smiled, “have you seen it?”

“No, I’ve managed to avoid it so far,” Regina replied.

“Oh,” Emma said, “so… you… haven’t seen mine then?”

“I saw September, I believe you’re in it twice?” Regina asked.

“Yes, February,” Emma nodded, “what did you think of September, it wasn’t too much was it?”

Regina blinked, not thinking for a second that her opinion would matter to the Sheriff, “not too much, no,” Regina said evenly.

“Oh, you hate it don’t you?” Emma rolled her eyes and turned away.

“What? No!” Regina said quickly, “it’s… it’s fine.”

“Fine?!” Emma turned around and stared at Regina, “oh God, it’s terrible, I knew I shouldn’t have let Ruby talk me into it.”

“Emma,” Regina stepped forward to calm the blonde, “there’s nothing wrong with it, it’s certainly not terrible, you look… well, you look beautiful.”

“It’s not slutty is it?” Emma asked in a quiet voice.

“No! Of course not, it’s... like David said, it’s a bit of fun, there’s absolutely nothing wrong with it and it’s certainly not slutty. You could never be slutty,” Regina admitted.

Emma smiled and stared at the brunette for a few moments until Henry breezed into the kitchen with his laptop in his hand, “Mom, do you have any of these symptoms...”

Regina rolled her eyes as Henry began listing every potential symptom ever suffered.

Chapter 15

Emma closed the lid of Henry's laptop silently allowing Henry barely enough time to retract his fingers from the keyboard.

“Wha?” Henry looked at her with confusion.

“We are not going to play online diagnostics, I’ve played it, everyone has something terrible and unpronounceable,” Emma told him firmly, “your mom has already told you that she has a very valid fear of doctors, do you think telling her she might have something awful will make it any better?”

Henry considered that for a moment before nodding, “you’re right, Emma, sorry Mom,” he said to Regina, “I just wanted to help.”

“I know Henry,” Regina smiled at him.

“The doctor’s here are different to the Enchanted Forest,” Henry told her, “like when I broke my leg.”

“You broke your leg?” Emma questioned.

“I know that, Henry,” Regina ignored Emma, “it’s an irrational fear, do you know what that is?”

Henry nodded, “like me and flies?”

“You don’t like flies?” Emma asked in surprise as she wondered if she really knew anything about Henry.

“Exactly,” Regina nodded, “I know that the hospital here in Storybrooke is full of modern technology and is nothing like what... I experienced,” she mumbled the last part before swallowing and continuing, “but I’m still fearful and as my magic is controlled by my emotions it’s not good idea for me to go there.”

Emma regarded Regina for a moment and was suddenly overcome by the realisation of what a huge occasion it was for Regina to admit that she was frightened, especially in front of Emma. This woman wasn't the woman who drugged her and got her locked up for the night, nor was she the woman who threw a punch in Emma's face, nor was she the woman who tried to poison her with a giant apple turnover.

This was Regina. Suddenly Mary Margaret's drunken reminiscing on times gone by in the Enchanted Forest seemed to make sense, Emma had always thought that Mary Margaret was a little generous in her descriptions of Regina in the early days. She blamed it on Mary Margaret being relatively sweet and naïve and the fact that she was a child when she first met Regina but now, seeing this calm and gentle side to the older woman she realised that maybe there was some truth in it.

Emma suddenly realised that both Regina and Henry were looking at her expectantly, "sorry? I was miles away," Emma admitted.

"I was saying," Regina repeated, "that we mustn't keep you from your duties any longer."

It was only then that Emma remembered that she was still on duty, "right, yes," she stumbled as she looked at her watch, "I have a couple of things to do at the office but I'll swing by later."

"You will?" Regina questioned.

"Yes, I will," Emma told her, "I'll bring food, you need to rest."

Regina looked like she was about to argue but Emma continued, "I want you to take a bath, do some stretches, just chill out, no work, no nothing. See if we can cure your headache by more traditional methods."

"I'll be quiet," Henry told her, knowing that his clomping around the house and loud video games was probably not going to help her headache.

"And..." Emma started as she looked at Regina timidly.

“And?” Regina asked with a sigh.

“I’d like to speak to Gold,” Emma told her, “I’ll be vague but there might be something he can suggest, something he knows.”

“Yeah, Grandpa will help,” Henry nodded happily.

“Henry, please, you know I hate it when you call him that,” Regina complained before she looked at Emma, “very well, let’s see what the im...” she looked at Henry, “what Mister Gold has to say.”

“Great,” Emma smiled.

“But,” Regina said firmly and looked at them both, “no one else is to know. I’m deadly serious on this, Emma, Henry, no one else can know. Not David, not Mary Margaret, not Ruby, not anyone.”

“Okay, Mom,” Henry said casually and picked up his laptop.

Regina took his arm and turned him around and knelt in front of him, “Henry, I need to you understand, no one can know,” she repeated seriously, “there are a lot people who are afraid of my magic, people who would cause a disturbance if they thought I was not in control of my magic. I need you to keep this a secret, just you, me and Emma. Okay?”

Henry registered the words and nodded with sad understanding, he wasn’t blind to the people in the town who still wished his mother ill, “I won’t tell anyone,” he promised.

Regina gave him a sad smile and nodded for him to leave as she stood up and looked at Emma, “that goes for you too, Gold but no one else.”

“You trust Gold to keep it quiet?” Emma asked.

“No, but I trust that no one socialises with Gold enough to listen and if they did they wouldn’t believe a word that came out of his poisonous mouth anyway,” Regina shrugged.

Emma nodded, “what do you want for dinner? I’ll pick something up from Granny’s...”

“You don’t have to do that,” Regina told her with a confused look.

“I want to,” Emma shrugged, “I want to feel useful.”

The sassy remark on Regina’s lips died as quickly as it arrived and she nodded, “I’ll have the chicken salad... thank you.”

Emma smiled and nodded and turned to leave the kitchen, as she got to the door she turned back and looked at Regina, “you’ll rest, yes?”

“I will, as ordered,” Regina told her with a soft smile.

Chapter 16

After Emma had left Regina had wandered around the downstairs of the house in a bit of a daze, wondering exactly what had happened. She had been keeping her secret very secure for the last few months and suddenly everything was out in the open and to Emma Swan of all people.

And now the irritating blonde knew of her fear of Whale and the other quacks and was probably having a good laugh at her expense. She didn't know what made her suddenly confide such personal details, she presumed it had something to do with Henry's presence and his insistence that she explain what was going on. She had wanted to ask Emma to leave but she knew the stubborn woman would have refused and, maybe, a small part of her wanted her to be there.

She thought back to her meltdown at the stables and remembered how Emma's soft touch and soothing words had brought her back from the edge of destruction. But in the next second she remembered how Emma's persevering nature had been what had sent her into a mania to start with.

Trust was not something that Regina freely gave out, especially not when it came to the Charmings and she had been wracking her brain to come up with a reason for Emma's insistently trying to help her. But just as the cause of the problems with her magic and her headache the answer was illusive to her.

Eventually, after a couple of hours of brooding, she had taken up Emma's suggestion of a bath, enjoying the darkness of the bathroom and the heat of the water as she closed her eyes and began to let her mind run wild with incoherent thoughts.

She didn't trust Emma not with her affiliation to the Charmings, her role as Saviour and her despicable rapport with the pirate. But the blonde confused her greatly, going to extremes to help her, to attempt to comfort her. The scene in the kitchen about the blasted calendar had almost made her feel that Emma valued her opinion. The whole notion of them being friends was absolutely preposterous.

The more she thought about it the more obvious it became, Emma was only hanging around to evaluate how dangerous Regina's uncontrollable magic was. Making tea and talking about friendships was all an elaborate act so that Regina would trust the blonde and divulge more information, more secrets and probably walk right into the cage that was being constructed at that very moment.

The blinding pain just behind her eyes was back and she launched herself out of the bath without a care that water splashed heavily onto the floor around her. She grabbed a towel and wrapped it around the body and looked at herself in the mirror, her hair was limp and wet tendrils stuck to her face which was pale and her eyes seemed sunken.

She heard the doorbell sound downstairs and knew that Emma had arrived back with food as she had promised. A small smile curled at Regina's lips as she considered that they were now on an equal footing, the momentary lapses from earlier were gone and now she knew what the Sheriff was up to.

Henry dashed to the door and opened it with a smile, "hey, Emma, did you bring food?"

Emma laughed, "wow, thanks, Henry! Glad I came just before food there," she winked at him as she walked in with a couple of large white takeout bags in her hand.

"How is she?" Emma asked softly as she looked around the downstairs of the house in case the brunette was around.

"She's having a bath," Henry answered, "I've not spoken to her all afternoon."

The sound of a door opening upstairs signalled Regina's imminent arrival and Henry and Emma quickly exchanged glances and walked into the hallway. Henry took the takeout bags from Emma and went into the kitchen with them while Emma turned to watch Regina as she made her way down the stairs.

"Hey," Emma smiled.

Regina nodded a small smile in the blonde's direction but said nothing.

"Feeling any better?" Emma asked as Regina reached the last step.

"I have a little more clarity," Regina nodded with a broad smile, "thank you again for bringing dinner, you really didn't have to."

"Happy to help out," Emma grinned as Regina held an arm up to direct the blonde into the kitchen.

Emma knew something was up, the second they sat down to dinner Regina had been excessively cordial and talkative. It was as if the older woman was attempting to convince Emma that everything was fine and nothing was wrong, but all it was doing was convincing Emma that something was very wrong.

Henry didn't seem to notice anything but then Emma considered that was because Regina was happily allowing him to eat the extra portion of fries Emma had bought in case Regina wanted more food. And when the dessert and extra ice cream made an appearance Emma knew that Regina was trying to blind Henry in a cloud of sugar.

When Henry asked if he was allowed to go out on his bike in an attempt to work off the food Regina happily opened the back door for him with a casual comment to remember to wear his helmet. She sat back at the kitchen dining table with narrowing eyes and a smile.

"So," Emma said, "you seem a lot better?"

"The bath did a world of good, put things in perspective," Regina told her sincerely.

"I see," Emma pushed an uneaten fry around her plate, "so, you're going to pretend that nothing is wrong so I leave you alone, is that the plan?"

Regina laughed a slow, deep rumble, "what's your plan, Miss Swan?"

"You say that as if you think I have an agenda," Emma gave up and ate the fry.

“Don’t you?” Regina asked as she took a sip of apple juice and regarded the blonde seriously.

“No,” Emma replied firmly, “what happened? I thought we were actually getting somewhere earlier and now you’re... whatever this is.”

“Enlightened,” Regina supplied.

“Suspicious,” Emma corrected, “I don’t know what you think I’m up to but I assure you I’m not.”

Emma’s mobile phone rang and she turned to her coat that was hanging on the back of her chair and pulled the device out of her pocket and looked at the screen with a sigh, “sorry,” she said to Regina as she answered the call.

“Hook?”

Regina rolled her eyes and sat back in her chair with her arms folded over her chest.

“Yeah,” Emma continued listening, “sure, look, I need to call you back. Yeah, it’s, it’s a work thing, okay. Yeah, bye.”

“Work thing?” Regina said as Emma hung up the phone.

“Just trying to get him off the phone,” Emma told her.

“And you wonder why I think you’re up to something,” Regina snorted as she stood up to clear the plates.

“I’m up to something because I lied to get someone off the phone?” Emma asked incredulously.

Regina shook her head, “no, you’re up to something because of the company you keep!”

“Hook?” Emma laughed, “he’s harmless.”

Regina threw a plate into the sink and it smashed as she spun around and glared at Emma, “harmless? That man is anything but harmless! How you all manage to forget everyone’s crimes but mine... I will never cease to be amazed!”

“Okay, so he’s a pirate,” Emma stood up, not wanting to be sitting down when Regina was in such a rage.

Regina looked at Emma in utter shock and opened and closed her mouth a few times as she struggled for words, “that... swine... is the whole reason I am suffering as I am!”

Emma frowned, “you can’t blame Hook for what Greg did, surely?”

“You seem to forget who gave me the cuff that obstructed my magic and then helped Greg to strap me to a metal table to PUMP HUNDREDS OF VOLTS OF ELECTRICITY THROUGH MY BODY!” Regina shouted in rage.

Emma knew Hook was a shady character and she knew he used his charm to get away with things but she wasn’t sure how she had managed to forget his role in Regina’s capture and torture. But she had. Regina was perfectly accurate and well within her rights to be furious with Emma.

“Regina...” Emma tried.

“No!” Regina pointed at her, “no, I don’t want to hear it, I know what you’re up to. All of you!”

Emma took a step back in fear of what Regina might do next and hit the chair she had been sat at with her foot, causing her jacket to fall to the floor. Out of the pocket fell the leather cuff, the same leather cuff that Hook used to render Regina powerless.

She looked at the cuff and then looked up at Regina who was staring at the cuff with something in between shock, rage and fear. Before her face turned to anger.

Chapter 17

As she flew through the air Emma briefly hoped that the kitchen door would be what broke her fall but the force of Regina's magical shove caused her to tear the door from its hinges and continue until she landed on the hard marble floor of the hallway. Her back took the brunt of the impact and her head cracked loudly on the floor as she skidded a few more feet before coming to an undignified stop.

She attempted to stand up or even move but nothing was happening, her body was thoroughly against the idea as it throbbed in pain. She managed to lift her head in time to see Regina stalking towards her with fury in her eyes and a fireball in her palm.

"Get up," Regina bit out as she got closer and the grand ceiling light in the hallway started to flicker.

Emma tried again but coordinating her limbs seemed somehow impossible, "can't," she mumbled.

"What was that, dear?" Regina asked in a sickly sweet voice.

"Can't... get up..." Emma slurred as her eyes fluttered in an attempt to get a better focus on things.

"Oh, sorry, let me help," Regina smiled and extinguished the fireball and waved her hand and suddenly Emma felt her entire body being lifted from the cold, hard ground of the hallway floor until she was hanging in the air, legs dangling helplessly.

Emma's head slumped down on her chest and Regina grinned, "this didn't quite go to plan did it, Miss Swan?"

Emma let out a small laugh and Regina stepped closer so she was just below where Emma was being held in the air, "do you find this funny?"

“Not particularly,” Emma admitted.

“Then why are you laughing?” Regina almost sounded like a petulant child.

“Because I’m so stupid,” Emma muttered.

“Well, that’s undeniable.” Regina agreed.

“For trying to help you,” Emma continued.

“Help me?!” Regina bellowed, “by putting that thing on me and what? Locking me up? Killing me?”

Emma laughed again and now Regina was incensed, Emma felt herself moving forward and lower towards the ground until her neck landed exactly where Regina’s grasping hand was reaching up to her. She was still floating off of the ground but now she had Regina’s grip tight around her throat, “not so funny now, is it?”

Emma grinned, “still pretty funny, actually...”

Regina blinked in shock, “I’m going to kill you, Miss Swan, are you sure you want to be laughing right now?”

“Doesn’t matter what I do or say, you’ve convinced yourself,” Emma mumbled as she winced in an attempt to get her eyes to focus and idly wondered if she was bleeding anywhere and that was the cause of this wooziness.

“Oh yes, because there’s a reasonable explanation for you to have that with you, let’s hear it,” Regina challenged.

“Gold had it,” Emma said, “I didn’t think that it was right that he had it...” she took a breath, “I wanted you to have it so you could... I dunno... destroy it, or keep it safe... whatever. And if you wanted to go to the hospital later down the line, or if you were worried about hurting Henry when your magic goes loopy then you could use it.”

Regina hesitated before sneering, “and you expect me to believe that?”

“I would never hurt you, not now,” Emma spluttered as Regina’s grip tightened, “but, before I can’t breath...”

“You’re hardly in a position to make requested,” Regina informed her.

“There was something else that Gold had, that belongs to you,” Emma said, “I knew you’d want it back.”

“Am I supposed to fall for this?” Regina laughed.

“It’s in my jacket pocket,” Emma ignored her tone.

Curiosity got the better of Regina and she held up her free hand and Emma’s jacket appeared in her hand and she held it towards Emma and released her right hand from the magic grip, “you get it but one false move and I will snap your neck like a twig.”

Emma reached into the inner pocket of her jacket and felt around until her fingers grasped something and she pulled it out and held it for Regina to see. The coat fell from Regina fingers as she gasped and reached for the solid gold ring. A moment later Emma fell to the floor in a heap as Regina stared at the ring, her ring, Daniel’s ring, in wonder.

“How?” Regina whispered, “but...”

“I saw it in the shop,” Emma muttered, “he told me what it was so I took it for you, I thought it might be some comfort to have it back.”

Regina put the ring back on her finger and looked at it with tears in her eyes before she turned back to Emma and looked at her with confusion, “I don’t understand you.”

“Yeah,” Emma said as she sat up and rubbed the back of her neck, “I’m getting that.”

Regina bent down and lifted Emma’s hair out of the way to examine her neck and head, “you’re not bleeding,” she told the blonde sombrely.

“Great, can you tell my eyes to focus,” Emma asked her as she attempted to balance herself while sitting down.

Regina took the blonde’s face in her hands and tilted her head so she could examine her, “you have a concussion,” she told Emma gently, “let’s get you into the study.”

Emma didn’t argue but then she didn’t move either and Regina realised that she would need to help the woman up. With a small sigh she pulled Emma into a standing position and held her waist as she helped her to walk to the study, once they were in there she helped to lower the blonde onto the sofa and then covered her knees with a blanket.

“I’m going to get some water and some peas,” Regina said.

“Peas?” Emma frowned, clearly wondering if she had heard correctly.

“Frozen peas,” Regina explained as she stood up, “for the swelling.”

“Oh,” Emma said as Regina left the room. She blinked a few times and tried to focus her eyes, which were luckily returning to normal now. She wanted to kick herself for being so foolish, she should have stuck to her original plan and told Regina about the cuff straight away and given it to her immediately. But as Regina had seemed off Emma didn’t want to do anything that might push her over the edge, the damn thing falling out of her pocket wasn’t factored into her plans at all and now she was suffering for it.

Regina entered the room with a glass of water and a bag of frozen peas and Emma looked at her earnestly, “Regina, what do I have to do? Tell me, anything, I just want you to know you can trust me... what do I need to do for you to know you can trust me?”

Regina stopped dead and looked at the blonde with bewilderment, here she was, the daughter of the two idiots having just been thrown through a solid wooden door and then almost throttled to death and now she was asking what she could do for Regina to trust her. This wasn’t the actions of someone attempting to trap her, if that had been the case Emma would have left the

second she could. But she was sat on the sofa with a pleading expression begging for Regina's trust.

When Regina thought about how close she had been to killing the girl she felt tears start to form in her eyes. With a trembling lip she finally spoke up, "Emma, I think I need help..."

Chapter 18

Emma stood up from the sofa, allowing the blanket to drop to the floor and quickly took the frozen peas and water from Regina and put them on the coffee table before leading the older woman to the sofa and sitting her down.

“I... I nearly killed you,” Regina whispered in shock.

“Nah,” Emma laughed, “it would take a bit more than that to end me.”

Regina stared at Emma, “how can you laugh at a time like this? You have concussion, oh,” she suddenly remembered, “you have concussion, you need to drink water and rest and not talk about anything stressful.”

“Did you just look that up online?” Emma asked as she reached for the glass of water, knowing that Regina wouldn’t stop glaring at her until she did.

“I might have, I’m not familiar with concussion treatments,” Regina admitted, “Emma, I’m so sorry, I don’t know what came over me.”

“Paranoia,” Emma told her softly, “you weren’t yourself, Regina.”

“Drink,” Regina ordered and picked up the frozen peas, “and then we need to apply this to the bump on your head.”

“Who says there’s a bump on my head?” Emma asked and then took a few large gulps of water.

“You have concussion, you must have struck your head,” Regina told her obviously.

“What are we going to do?” Emma asked.

“As I said you need these peas on the bump on your head and we...” Regina started.

Emma snatched the peas out of Regina's hand, "about you, Regina, what are we going to do about you?"

"Oh," Regina looked a little lost, "I... I don't know."

"Well, I've been thinking, and I'm taking my life in my hands here," Emma joked with a small smile to lighten the mood, "but I'm worried that there could be some kind of damage from... you know, what Greg did."

Regina nodded, "it has crossed my mind," she admitted as she took the peas from Emma and gently parted her blonde locks with one hand until she came across an angry looking red bump on the back of her head.

"Regina, can I ask you something?" Emma asked as the brunette fussed with parting Emma's hair as gently as she could.

"I'm sure you will anyway," Regina commented, "this may sting," she admitted as she held the frozen peas to the bump.

Emma hissed in pain but soon shook it off, "Hook," she said, "how... how much, well, how involved was he in what happened?"

"Are you sure you want to hear this about your boyfriend?" Regina commented lightly.

"Ow," Emma winced as the cold from the peas started to take effect, "he's not my boyfriend, we don't even speak anymore."

"Then why do you want to know?" Regina questioned.

"Because I want to know what he did, or what he didn't do," Emma said simply.

"Well," Regina sighed, "he tricked me into wearing the cuff. Convinced me it was my mother's," she paused while Emma muttered an expletive, "and then he helped Greg and Tamara to get me to the cannery and he put me on the gurney, coppering a feel as he did, obviously."

Emma spun around to look at Regina, "seriously?"

“Seriously,” Regina confirmed, “are you surprised by his actions? He’s a pirate, dear. Now turn around, I need to hold these in place and I can’t do that if you’re going to be turning around every two seconds.”

Emma turned around, understanding that the harsh tone was not entirely meant for her and was more a protective mechanism that Regina had refined over the years. Once the peas were back in position Regina continued, “he... he strapped me down and waved that wretched hook over my body. He said they were going to help him to kill Gold, which was why he was helping them. He drew the line at attaching the electrodes. I suppose I should be thankful for that.”

Emma put her hand on the edge of the sofa and attempted to push herself to her feet and on the second attempt she managed it. Regina stood up quickly and caught her arm, “Emma?”

“Let me go,” Emma said as she brushed the hair away from her face and attempted to walk away.

“What are you doing?” Regina stood in front of the blonde to block her exit, “Emma, you’re in no state to be going anywhere.”

“I’m going to arrest Hook,” Emma said firmly, “he’s an accessory to... to torture and attempted murder.”

“He’s a greasy pirate with questionable morals,” Regina sighed and gently pushed Emma back onto the sofa.

“But,” Emma argued but she was too disorientated to stand up again.

“But nothing,” Regina argued, “time has passed, let’s not bring it back up again.”

“You could have died,” Emma faced Regina and looked at her with horror.

“And you could have died ten minutes ago when I threw you across the hall,” Regina pointed out, “are you going to arrest me?”

“No,” Emma admitted, “but... Hook...”

“Is Hook,” Regina said as she spun her finger around in the air to instruct Emma to turn around again so she could continue to hold the frozen peas to the bump on her head. Regina located the spot again and put the peas back and gave Emma a comforting squeeze on the shoulder when the blonde winced at the contact.

A few silent moments passed while they were both lost in their own thoughts until Emma suddenly spoke up, “I’m sorry.”

“What on earth are you sorry for now?” Regina sighed.

“For not finding you sooner,” Emma said.

Regina sighed again, louder this time, “not that again.”

“It’s how I feel,” Emma argued.

“You’re an idiot,” Regina muttered.

“So, what are we going to do?” Emma asked.

“About your idiocy? I’m afraid you’re most likely stuck with it, we’re blessed that Henry has managed to avoid that particular Charming family trait,” Regina quipped.

“Hilarious,” Emma deadpanned, “I meant what are we going to do if... there is damage. You know, that’s causing the headaches.”

“I don’t know,” Regina answered honestly.

“Do you think the headaches are what’s causing your magic issues?” Emma asked.

“I think so,” Regina confirmed, “as I said, magic is emotion and my magic usually goes loopy, as you put it, when I’m emotional.”

“So, we need to find the cause of your headache,” Emma remarked, “and don’t say it’s me or my family because we’ve hardly seen you for months.”

“True but you leave a lasting impression,” Regina laughed softly.

“What happened?” Henry frowned as he entered the room.

Both women looked at him in surprise and Regina attempted to stutter out a response when Emma spoke up, “I was just leaving and I fell backwards on the step in the hall, cracked my head on the floor,” she explained.

“Wow,” Henry looked out of the door and into the hall at the scene of the crime, “did it bleed?”

“No, luckily,” Regina said but both women laughed at Henry’s disappointed expression.

“What’s with the peas?” Henry asked.

“Emma has a concussion,” Regina explained, the cold helps the swelling go down.

“Cool,” Henry said with a grin.

“Yeah, all the blood having a party in a swollen lump on my brain is cool,” Emma rolled her eyes.

“Sorry,” Henry grinned, “so, what happens now, does she need a doctor?”

“We’ll see,” Regina said, “she needs to be monitored for a day or so.”

“By us?” Henry asked, “she can’t drive home.”

“Er, I... I suppose we’ll ask David to pick her up,” Regina said.

“Does he know what to look out for?” Henry quizzed, “he did have a broken toe for a week without noticing.”

“Well I only know what to look out for because I’ve looked it up online,” Regina confessed.

“That’s even worse, David and Mary Margaret are terrible at looking things up,” Henry argued.

“We can’t just kidnap her,” Regina stated.

“I’m right here,” Emma said, “I may have a concussion but I’m not deaf.”

“What are your symptoms?” Henry asked Emma as he pulled his phone out of his pocket and started to look up concussion.

“I dunno, cold head,” Emma said with a laugh.

“Do you have a headache?” Henry asked.

“I have since you got here,” Emma joked.

“Did you lose consciousness? Or do you have amnesia surrounding the event?” Henry continued reading.

“No,” Emma gave a sideways glance to Regina, “I remember it perfectly, like I said, I tripped.”

Regina gave her a grateful smile.

“Do you feel confused? Are you dizzy?” Henry asked.

“A little,” Emma admitted.

“Do you have a ringing in the ears?” Henry continued.

“Just you,” Emma sighed.

“Wow,” Henry said as he read on, “some symptoms could be delayed by hours or days, you might suffer from concentration problems, sensitivity to light and noise, irritability...”

“Thank you, Henry,” Regina interrupted, “I am aware of the symptoms and what to look for.”

“Then she should stay here,” Henry complained, “Mary Margaret and David won’t know about concussion, or how to look it up. Mary Margaret doesn’t even have a data package on her phone.”

“Fine, fine, I’ll call them and will see what they say,” Regina said, “come here and hold this,” she told Henry and handed the frozen peas over to him and directed him how to hold them.

“I’ll just go into the kitchen and give them a call,” Regina said as she gave Emma one last look and then left the room.

“Did it hurt?” Henry asked Emma.

“Yeah, Kid,” Emma nodded.

“Should be more careful,” Henry grinned. Emma was forever telling Henry he was clumsy and to be more careful.

In the kitchen Regina sat at the table, she had picked up the forgotten leather cuff from the floor and placed it on the table in front of her. She sighed and scrolled through her contacts for David, while things were better with Mary Margaret she would always find it easier to talk with David.

She dialled the number and pressed the phone to her ear and waited for the confused voice of David, “hello Regina?”

“David,” Regina started nervously, “firstly everything is fine but Emma has had a little accident at my house.”

“Oh?” David asked with a hint of trepidation.

“She slipped on the step and hit her head on the floor, she seems to have a minor concussion,” Regina explained, keeping to the same story that Emma had told Henry.

“Is she okay?” David asked quickly.

“She’s fine but there are symptoms that may show up over the next few hours or even days,” Regina continued, “I... I didn’t know what you wanted

to do? She's welcome to stay here but if you want to come and bring her home I can explain it to you?"

"Can I talk to her?" David questioned.

"Yes, yes, of course, let me take the phone to her," Regina said and got up and walked back towards the study. She could hear David relaying the news to Mary Margaret as she walked into the study and held the phone out to Emma, "your father would like to speak to you."

Emma took the phone and started to speak with her father, she joked about her clumsiness and explained her symptoms and said that Regina was taking good care of her. She held the phone to her shoulder and looked up at Regina, "would it be a massive pain if I stayed here the night?"

"Not at all," Regina found herself saying.

Emma went back to her phone call explaining that she thought it would be best to stay as she didn't feel up to moving around too much. Henry was beaming happily at the prospect of Emma staying over. A few moments later Emma hung up the phone and handed it back to Regina, "they agree its best I stay here as long as you're sure it's not a problem?"

"No problem, especially after all you've done for me today," Regina said seriously before looking at Henry, "Henry, could you open the window in the spare room to air it out a little?"

Henry nodded and threw the frozen peas at Regina as he jogged out of the study.

"Please don't come at me with those peas again, I can't feel my head," Emma laughed.

Regina smiled and placed the defrosted mess on the table, "thank you for... what you told Henry..."

"Thank you for trusting me," Emma smiled, "eventually."

Chapter 19

An hour later Henry had decided the whole concussion thing wasn't as interesting as he'd initially thought and was itching to leave the study and go and play his video game. Eventually Emma had told him to go and he had rushed off but not before giving her a gentle hug and telling her that he was happy she was staying that evening.

While Henry had been entertaining Emma, Regina had sat at her desk to do some more work on the stables accounts.

Once Henry left Regina spoke without looking up, "can I get you something? Something to eat? Some tea perhaps?"

"No, thank you," Emma shook her head as she pulled the blanket around herself and smiled.

Regina noticed the movement and looked up, "are you cold? I can light a fire?"

"Oh, I'm fine, this blanket is just so soft," Emma replied as she snuggled into it,

Regina regarded her seriously for a few moments, considering something as she looked the blonde up and down curiously.

"Do I have something on my face?" Emma asked with worry.

"No," Regina assured, "I'm just... I'm wondering if you are out of sorts."

Emma shrugged, "I feel fine."

"Well, you would, dear," Regina said as she lowered her pen down and removed her glasses to examine Emma's face carefully.

“Is there a way to test?” Emma asked as she regarded Regina, “put your glasses back on.”

“Why?” Regina frowned.

“They make you look pretty,” Emma explained with a smile.

Regina blinked and then shook her head in a gentle laugh, “well you failed that test.”

“Oh, you look pretty without them too,” Emma explained, misunderstanding Regina’s comment, “you’re always pretty, It’s just I never get to see you with glasses, it makes me feel special.”

Regina considered this for a moment with a pensive expression before picking up her pen again, “maybe you should rest, Miss Swan?”

Emma frowned and Regina looked down at her paperwork again to signal an end to the uncomfortable conversation.

“I can tell you that you’re pretty,” Emma complained in a low mumble, “this always happens when people find out you’re bi. You make a comment and people immediately think you want to jump into bed with them, you can’t just compliment someone.”

“I assure you,” Regina declared without looking up from her work, “my reaction has nothing to do with your sexuality, which I was unaware of, by the way. Merely a concern that you are being a little more open with me than I would suspect you would normally be,” she looked up, “I’m protecting you from your concussed self.”

“You didn’t know I was bi?” Emma asked softly.

“No,” Regina shook her head and looked back down at her paperwork.

“Huh, I thought everyone knew after the thing with Ruby,” Emma shrugged.

Regina’s fountain pen scratched some notes on a piece of paper as she waited for Emma to continue that tantalising thread but nothing was

forthcoming. After the seconds stretched into minutes she spoke again, “what thing?”

Emma smiled, “I thought you were protecting me from my concussed self?”

“You mentioned it,” Regina pointed out, “but, you’re right, you don’t have to tell me if you’re uncomfortable.”

“No, it’s fine,” Emma started and Regina wondered why she suddenly felt nervous about the prospect of Emma divulging sordid details about some public tryst with the waitress.

“When we were doing the calendar, I didn’t really want to,” Emma admitted, “I mean I wanted to do something for charity and everything but I didn’t want to be naked for charity, you know?”

Regina focussed intently on her work so Emma couldn’t read her face, “I can certainly understand that.”

“So, Ruby was taking the pictures of the girls, she’s a really good photographer,” Emma smiled, “and I was really nervous and stuff... so we started drinking...”

Regina felt herself grip the fountain pen a little tighter as images of Ruby taking advantage of a drunk and naked Emma came to the forefront of her mind.

“Anyway, I’m not great at holding my drink,” Emma explained, “so I was telling Ruby about the last time someone took naked photos of me...”

With her grip tightening Regina worried that the expensive fountain pen might suddenly break in two under the pressure and couldn’t help but look up at Emma. The blonde was laying down on the sofa, staring at the ceiling with a wistful smile as she recounted her story,

“She was a photographer too, she always wanted to take pictures of me but I wasn’t sure. I never liked my body or my face,” Emma scrunched up her

nose, “but one day I agreed and it was so much fun, because I trusted her, I guess. Anyway, I told Ruby the story and she realised I was bi but she didn’t know I hadn’t told anyone. Not her fault, I should have said I was kind of keeping it quiet. Next day it started spreading through the town, small towns and gossip, eh?”

“Why did you want to keep it quiet?” Regina asked quietly.

“You don’t know what people’s reaction will be,” Emma explained as she tilted her head to regard Regina, “especially in a small town. And I had no idea what a small town of fairy tale people would think of their Sheriff being bi.”

“And, what did you discover?” Regina quizzed.

“That same sex relationships in the Enchanted Forest were pretty common and now Janine Lassiter from the shoe shop won’t leave me alone,” Emma admitted.

“We may be backwards in some ways but in others we can be quite progressive,” Regina told her, “Miss Lassiter is leech though, I recommend avoiding her.”

“Yeah, she does this thing in Granny’s where she licks her lips,” Emma shivered.

Regina made a face and attempted to focus on her work again but a few moments later Emma spoke again, “so, you... you don’t mind?”

“That you’re bisexual?” Regina questioned without looking up.

“Yeah,” Emma confirmed.

“Why would I?” Regina asked with a frown.

“Because of Henry,” Emma admitted.

“I’m not following your trail of thought,” Regina sighed as she looked up at Emma again.

“I thought you might not want Henry to know... you know, in case it confuses him,” Emma tried to explain but sighed as she knew she was doing a very good job.

“I want Henry to be happy, whoever he ends up with, as long as he finds love. If his mother can help to expand his horizons then that is a good thing,” Regina acknowledged.

Emma smiled and Regina returned the smile before ducking her head back to her paperwork.

After a few moments the silence was broken again, “Regina?”

Regina let out a quiet sigh, “yes, Miss Swan?”

“Have you... ever... you know,” Emma asked hesitantly, “with a woman?”

Regina closed her eyes for a moment to summon the strength necessary for dealing with the concussed Sheriff, “no,” she said simply.

“Oh,” Emma answered simply but sounded like she was building up to a follow up question.

“Miss Swan, you really should rest before you potentially say something you’ll regret,” Regina told her swiftly.

“I trust you,” Emma admitted.

“Yes, well, for the sake of any potential future awkwardness maybe you should rest anyway?” Regina pleaded.

“Put your glasses back on,” Emma grinned.

Regina sighed and put the glasses back on her face before shaking her head and continuing with her work.

Chapter 20

It was an hour later when Regina realised that Emma had fallen asleep and she exhaled a pensive breath in relief. She risked a glance up at the blonde who was cuddled up on the sofa in the study with Regina's blanket wrapped around her.

Regina quietly lowered her pen as if worried that any sudden movement would wake the Sheriff. Part of her wanted to ensure that the woman slept and recovered from her injury but part of her desperately wanted to avoid any potential awkwardness. Emma was certainly more vocal with Regina when she was concussed and Regina was torn between being interested in this softer side of the usually harsh blonde and being disappointed that Emma would never usually show that side to her.

With a small sigh Regina stood up and regarded the blonde for a few moments as she considered her options, in the end she closed her eyes and took a deep breath to aid her concentration. A moment later she raised her hands and both she and Emma had been transported to the upstairs guestroom, Emma tucked up in the bed but still fully clothed.

Regina quietly crossed the room to the window that Henry had opened earlier and softly closed it and drew the curtains closed as well. She walked towards the hallway and stood in the doorway for a moment as she looked back and regarded the blonde thoughtfully before gently closing the door.

“Mom, where’s Emma?” Henry asked as he walked up the upstairs hallway from the stairs.

Regina held her finger to her lips and pointed to the bedroom door she had just closed, “she’s asleep,” she whispered as she approached Henry, “as you should be.”

Henry grinned, “did you magic her up here?”

Regina hesitated for a moment, not entirely sure of the appropriate answer.

“It’s okay,” Henry promised, “it’s nice and it means your magic is okay... at the moment, anyway.”

Regina bowed her head as a light blush touched her cheeks in embarrassment at being caught doing something nice for the woman.

“Did you see her fall?” Henry asked with interest as Regina guided him back into his bedroom.

“Yes,” Regina said simply as an image of Emma flying from the kitchen and through the door flash through her mind. She hadn’t seen Emma land but she had heard the crack, not that she had cared much about it at the time.

Henry laughed softly, “she’s clumsier than me.”

“Perhaps,” Regina said as she tidied away Henry’s clothes from the previous day that he had left strewn around the room.

“She’ll be okay, though, right?” Henry asked as he climbed into bed.

“Yes, I’m sure she’ll be just fine,” Regina smiled at him as she placed all the clothes in his laundry basket.

“It’s nice that you’re looking out for Emma even though you don’t like her,” Henry pointed out as Regina sat on the edge of his bed.

“I...” Regina paused, she couldn’t really deny her scathing attitude towards Emma since she’d known the blonde, “I am trying, to be better,” she settled on.

He smiled at her in a way that her heart always longed for, acceptance and love, “I know,” he nodded, “I love you, Mom.”

“I love you too, Henry,” she bent down and kissed his forehead and stood up from the bed, “sweet dreams,” she offered as she exited his room and walked downstairs and back to her study.

She unlocked a cabinet and removed a crystal cut tumbler and a decanter of apple cider and poured herself half a glass before relocking the cabinet

and walking to her desk. Flopping heavily in the desk chair she looked at the empty sofa and let her mind evaluate the actions of the day.

From a position of calm she understood that her sudden suspicion of Emma was out of character and without warrant. The certainty she had felt earlier of Emma's desire to double-cross her had now vanished, Regina took a sip of cider as she considered her sudden mood swing.

She was aware that she was an emotionally charged individual but she was usually quite consistent in her opinions, it was rare that she changed her mind on someone so quickly and so completely. With a shaking hand she took another gulp of cider as she recalled her hand grasped around Emma's neck with every intention of throttling the blonde as punishment for her betrayal.

Now the intensity of the moment had dissipated she wondered what on earth she had been thinking. Emma was many things, many annoying things, but a traitor was not one of them. She was a Charming through and through and Regina could never picture her having a secretive agenda.

The realisation brought Regina's sudden mood swing into stark contrast and she took another sip of cider as she wondered, not for the first time, if something was seriously wrong with her. She'd looked up her symptoms online a number of times and she knew all the potential things she could have wrong with her, she also knew the symptoms to look out for.

Paranoia, confusion, they were things on her list to worry about. They would be bad for symptoms for anyone but for Regina they were potentially lethal. To other people. She shivered at the thought of what could have happened to Emma if she hadn't been able to convince Regina of her innocence. Regina looked at the ring on her finger, Daniel's ring, the simple gold ring that had probably saved Emma's life.

The possibility that her temper and her magic could combine again and potentially hurt someone, maybe even Henry, was too much for her to take. She downed the rest of the cider and heavily lowered the glass to the desk. Quickly rising before she changed her mind she walked into the kitchen and picked up the leather cuff that she had earlier placed on the table and with a quick breath she fastened it to her wrist.

Chapter 21

When Emma woke up she knew something was wrong. Or maybe not wrong, just different. She opened one eye and tried to figure out what it was that was confusing her, what it was that was different. The room was dark and she struggled to make anything out but slowly as the shadows started to emerge to offer depth to the room she realised something very quickly, she had no idea where she was.

With a sense of foreboding she started to sit up but quickly realised that was a bad idea as a thundering headache swept through her brain causing her to flop back down. The impact of her head on the pillow caused her to notice a throbbing on the back of her head and she reached up to run her fingers over the area only to be confused as to why she was still wearing her light grey sweater despite being tucked up in bed.

A bed she didn't recognise, a bed that was larger and softer than her own bed at the apartment. A bed that was covered in luxuriously soft cottons and was so warm and inviting that she just wanted to close her eyes and fall back to sleep which she very nearly did before suddenly jolting herself awake again. She wasn't sure she was safe and a flashback to Jefferson and the drugged tea sprung to her mind as she took in the lavish surroundings.

Throwing back the covers she noticed with some relief that she was fully dressed in sweater, jeans and socks. She looked around for her jacket and boots but they were nowhere in sight as she pulled herself into a sitting position and attempted to get her dizziness under control enough to get the hell out of wherever she was.

Despite the darkness in the room her eyes had adjusted enough to find the door and she stood up on shaky legs and quickly crossed the room and quietly opened the door and stepped into an equally dark hallway. Her fight or flight radar was pinging heavily as she analysed her surroundings for either an exit strategy or a danger.

One end of the hallway seemed lighter and Emma assumed it led to a stairwell so she crept along the hallway, holding the wall as she went in an effort to counteract her dizziness. With all of her senses heightened she quickly detected a sound from one of the rooms off of the hallway and quickly manoeuvred herself so she was by the door where she heard movement and waited.

A few seconds later she heard the click of the door handle turning and then saw the shadow of the door itself opening. Pressed up against the wall and ready to attack if necessary Emma waited until a figure emerged from the doorway, luckily looking away from where Emma hide in the shadows. Knowing that this was a golden opportunity she quickly launched herself forward and quickly wrapped one arm around the lowered arms and midriff of the person and quickly forced her palm over their mouth and pulled them to her body to hold them in place.

Emma smiled in the knowledge that she had caught her kidnapper off guard and pulled them heavily back into the room they had just exited and whispered in their ear, “don’t move, I’m armed.”

It was then that Emma began to get that similar sensation she had awoken with, something was wrong, something was different. The body in her arms was not righting her, in fact they seemed still and calm, almost resigned to their fate. The hand around the midriff was touching delicate silks and when she had leaned in to whisper she had felt soft, long locks of hair brush against her face. A delicate perfume filled the room and she realised it was a woman in her arms and quickly let go and took a couple of shocked steps back.

The figure, the woman, took a step forward and turned on a bedside lamp and Emma threw her arm up to cover her eyes as the brightness blinded her.

“Emma, sit down,” she recognised the voice but her brain wasn’t supplying the information as quickly as she felt it ought to.

A gentle grip on her arm and a soft insistence to take a seat on the edge of a bed and Emma felt like she had no strength left in her to fight it and sunk heavily on the bed and winced at the bright light as she looked up.

“Regina?”

Regina smiled in what looked like relief as she knelt in front of Emma and placed a soft hand on the blonde’s knee as she looked up at Emma with concern, “are you okay?”

Emma didn’t answer as her brain chose that very moment to fill in all the blanks that had been missing in her memory and as a result she didn’t hear Regina’s question as she stared open mouthed at the floor.

“Emma?” Regina tried again softly, “do I need to call a doctor?”

“No,” Emma whispered, “I’m sorry, I... I woke up confused... I...” she looked around and took a couple of deep breaths to get her racing heart rate back to a normal pace.

When she looked back down at Regina’s face she was completely overwhelmed by the depth of emotion she saw in her expression. Regina was looking up at her as if nothing else mattered, her sole focus in that moment was Emma Swan, her eyes gently scanned her face for any sign of injury or any nuance of negative emotion. And Emma knew in that moment that no one had ever looked at her like that before, no one had ever regarded her with such care and kindness.

Emma couldn’t help herself. She quickly, though gently, brought her hands up to cup Regina’s face and leant forward and placed a soft and tender kiss on Regina’s beautiful and full lips. She pulled back just as swiftly, fearing that her heart would not be able to take the anguish of Regina pushing her away in repulsion. She closed her eyes and took a deep breath as she prepared herself for the angry deluge of rage that was probably about to come from Regina’s perfect lips.

When nothing happened she hesitantly opened her eyes to see Regina hadn’t moved and rather than looking disgusted she simply looked shocked and rooted to the spot as she looked at Emma with unreadable deep brown eyes.

Chapter 22

Blame it on the concussion, Emma thought to herself as she readied herself for Regina's no doubt impending commentary. The truth was Emma didn't really know why she had just kissed the woman but something strong within her had urged her to just do it.

She'd always thought Regina was attractive and considered that you'd have to be blind not to think otherwise but circumstances and fear of Regina's reaction had always kept her from exploring the thought any further. Long ago she had decided to keep things strictly professional between herself and the brunette, she didn't want her already shaky self-esteem to be crushed to dust by Regina's venomous rejection nor did she want to be banned from seeing Henry.

But in that moment when Emma processed nine hours of memories in the space of a nanosecond she came to several conclusions. Primarily that she cared about Regina and had known full well that she was putting herself into a dangerous situation by helping the former Mayor but knowing that there was no way she could leave her alone now.

Other thoughts and realisations struck her, the fact that she had come out as bisexual and Regina hadn't been utterly repulsed by the declaration in fact she hadn't said anything that had often haunted Emma's dreams when she had imagined Regina finding out her secret. In fact she was calm and unfazed by the whole thing, even saying it would be good for Henry to have the opportunity to broaden his knowledge when it came to relationships.

Then there was the fact that Regina had been so kind and gentle with her as she convalesced from her injury. While Regina seemed wracked with guilt over her role in Emma's injuries, that didn't seem to be the foundation for her caring nature, Emma detected there was more there.

So while all those memories and comprehensions fitted together in Emma's brain like the missing pieces of a jigsaw she had looked down and seen Regina's face looking up at her. Worry, concern, care, kindness,

affection had all been easily readable on the brunette's face and Emma just had to take the chance. She had to kiss her.

If Regina was going to push her away and rake her over the coals for her actions then at least Emma would have the memory of the one second kiss they had shared.

"Emma?" Regina finally found her voice and it came out in a confused whisper.

Blame it on the concussion, Emma told herself again but she found she couldn't speak as she panicked her over Regina would do to her now.

"Why did..." Regina drifted off.

"I... wanted to," Emma explained, not quite blaming everything on the concussion as she thought she had agreed with herself but to be honest everything was still a little hazy.

Regina was staring at her in confusion, clearly having her own vocal cord malfunction as she opened and closed her mouth while she attempted to come up with something to say.

Emma stared down at Regina's mouth as it opened and closed and she swallowed unconsciously and licked her dry lips as she examined the plump flesh of Regina's lips. Her eyes fell on the scar on Regina's upper lip and she noticed that without the foundation the brunette wore it was suddenly more prominent and infinitely sexier.

"I want to do it again," Emma whispered hoarsely.

Regina quickly stood up and took a step back and Emma looked at the black silk nightdress the woman was wearing with hungry eyes, it came down to respectfully cover Regina's knees and was in no way considered low cut. But it was still the least clothes Emma had ever seen Regina wearing and it was certainly having an effect on the blonde's thought processes.

“Miss Swan,” Regina said formally as she clasped her hands in front of her and fussed with her ring, “you... you’re clearly still suffering effects from the concussion. We should not discuss this now, you need to r-rest. To recover,” she explained while refusing to make eye contact with the blonde.

“Regina, I’m f...” Emma started.

“You are most certainly not fine,” Regina bit back in a quiet snap, no doubt in an effort to not wake a sleeping Henry.

Emma felt her heart sink and reckoned that this was where Regina would condemn her behaviour.

“You were stumbling down the hallway like a drunkard,” Regina said with a gesture towards the door, “you attacked me, presumably thinking I was some delinquent! You were incoherent, you didn’t know who I was, you didn’t know who you were. You said yourself you woke up confused and you look like you’re about to pass out!”

Emma’s heart soared to new levels, she hadn’t expected Regina’s entire rant to be borne out of concern for her but here it was. Regina was worried about her and Emma knew that the only reason for that was because Regina cared. Suddenly she remembered her words to Henry, ‘with love comes a need to protect people’ and while she was not saying the opposite was true she did know that a need to protect someone was a strong and positive emotion.

But Emma was dizzy and as much as she wanted to stand up and take the two small steps towards Regina and kiss her again she was not sure she had the strength to do so. Clearly she swayed at the thought as Regina rushed forward and put steady hands on Emma’s shoulders.

“Into bed,” Regina ordered gently as she pushed Emma softly down and lifted her heavy legs onto the bed.

“But this is your bed,” Emma mumbled in confusion, part of her was still desperately trying not to upset Regina. She knew a wrong move or a

miscalculated word could easily have her flying out of the window and onto the front lawn.

“You woke up confused,” Regina repeated, “and presumably afraid.”

Emma was about to argue with that statement as she felt Regina pull up a cover and tuck her into the bed.

“You can stay here, I’ll... I’ll figure something out... but I’ll be here in case you wake up confused again,” Regina told her firmly.

Emma fought with the sleepiness that was already overtaking most of her senses, she wanted to stay awake and to be with Regina. She didn’t want to sleep again and she certainly didn’t want to forget everything again when she woke up.

“Shh,” Regina whispered and Emma realised that she must have made some incoherent noises during her fruitless struggle to stay conscious, “it’s okay, I’m here, just rest.”

Emma could feel herself smile as the blackness of sleep swept her up again.

Chapter 23

It was morning. Emma knew it was morning because she could hear the birds singing and, despite her eyes being firmly closed, she could detect the brightness of the morning sun overpowering the dimming powers of the curtains. Her eyes were firmly closed because Emma had been awake for the last fifteen minutes and unlike the time she had woken in the middle of the night she had total recall of her actions.

Emma had decided that if her eyes remained closed she could revel in the moment that little bit longer, she could replay the infinitesimally small kiss from the early hours of the morning over and over. She could also feel satisfied and safe in the knowledge that Regina had put her to bed in her own bed in order to give her comfort and reassurance if it had been required.

So her eyes were firmly closed as she remembered events and enjoyed the soft feeling of a sinfully comfortable bed. But she knew it couldn't last forever, she was just being a coward, she had finally admitted her true feelings to herself. Feelings she had kept buried for such a long time, there was something about Regina that drew her to the woman.

It wasn't just the traffic-stopping good looks of the woman, it wasn't even the impressive intelligence or the cutting sense of humour. Though they were all definitely parts of the attraction. It was the hidden bits, the little glimpse of Regina that she hardly let show. The vulnerability, the caring and kindness that she attempted to cover up through fear that someone would think of them as a weakness and use them against her.

Emma had spent so much time and energy convincing Regina and others that she was indifferent to the woman that she had started to convince herself of that fact too. But then Emma had a lot of practice of keeping her bisexual feelings private, she'd experienced the hated looks and the damaging words.

Emma was all fight or flight and when it came to protecting her sexuality she was most definitely... flight. She hated herself for it but it was true, she knew she should stand up and be counted in a show of solidarity with her

fellow bisexuals of the world. But the problem was her fellow bisexuals were never around when she was being hurled abuse for kissing her girlfriend in public, or when she had been in foster homes and discovering that she didn't have a preference for boys like the other girls in school.

So Emma lay in Regina's warm bed, soaking up as much of the atmosphere as she could before all hell broke loose. Eyes closed to the world, a sleepy version of her flight instinct. If she was asleep then Regina couldn't shout at her, couldn't magic her into a toad, couldn't send her away, tell her how much she disgusted her. If she was asleep she could spend a little more time pretending that the kiss was a mutual thing, that it would happen again.

"Emma?" Regina's voice tentatively called her, "are you awake?"

Her tone was concerned and she sounded like she very much knew that Emma was awake.

Emma flickered her eyes open and was surprised to see Regina fully dressed and sat in a chair right beside the bed, a chair that she had seen in the corner of the room the previous night. Her expression was worried and it looked like she had been sat there all night, watching the blonde for any signs of further illness.

"Emma?" Regina spoke again as she frowned at the silence.

"Morning," Emma said in a husky tone that she didn't recognise.

Regina smiled with relief, "morning, how are you feeling?"

"A lot better," Emma replied with a tiny nod, tiny because it wasn't entirely true and her head was still throbbing but she suspected that was more from stress and worry than from the concussion.

Regina quickly leaned forward and reached for a glass of water that was on the bedside table but Emma looked at her wrist with a shocked frown and gasped as she reached out and grabbed Regina's arm.

She stared at the leather cuff and so many questions flooded her mind but all she could do was stare at the cuff and whispered, “Regina?”

Regina snatched her arm back nervously and pulled her jacket sleeve down to cover the cuff, “you need medical attention,” she said simply.

“You put the cuff on for me?” Emma asked in confusion.

“Partially,” Regina admitted, “with my... tendency to panic... lately, I thought it would be safer if I were defused until a solution can be found. And you really need to see a doctor, your behaviour has been quite strange, even for you,” she added in jest with a small smile.

“So... you’re coming with me? To the hospital?” Emma clarified.

“Yes,” Regina nodded but held her hand up to prevent any further discussion, “I have not decided yet if I will seek medical assistance myself, this is simply to ensure your safety and wellbeing.”

Emma nodded, “I understand,” she paused and smiled at Regina warmly and with pride, “thank you.”

“For nearly killing you?” Regina huffed as she stood up and started to walk towards the bathroom, “you are still clearly confused and delusional, Miss Swan.”

“I nearly killed myself,” Emma argued as she sat up in bed and leaned her back against the headboard, “I shouldn’t have come here with the cuff, I should have discussed it with you first, anyone would have had that reaction. It’s like you coming to my house with a gun that you mean for me to use for my own protection.”

Regina was out of sight in the en suite bathroom and Emma imagined that she probably wasn’t doing anything, she just needed some space.

Eventually the brunette spoke up, “it’s kind that you defend my actions.”

“Not just kindness,” Emma replied, “so, how does it feel? The cuff I mean?”

“Strange,” Regina admitted as she stood in the doorway and regarded Emma warily, “unsettling.”

Emma hadn’t wanted Regina to feel that way, in a naïve way she was hoping that Regina would feel safe with the cuff, secure in the knowledge that a stray emotion wouldn’t result in an electricity bill to rival Maddison Square.

“I’m sorry,” Emma frowned, disconcerted that she was in some way responsible.

Regina shrugged, “no less than I deserve.”

Emma felt her anger spike, misplaced of course, just because she was angry at Regina’s feelings but that didn’t mean that she should take her anger out on Regina herself, “stop thinking like that,” Emma demanded.

Regina looked like she was going to reply but simply shook her head, “we need to get you to the hospital, I presume you would like some breakfast first?”

Emma knew a deflection when she heard one but she also knew a losing battle when she saw one. So she nodded, “that would be great, thank you.”

“Good,” Regina nodded and started to leave the room.

“I meant it, you know,” Emma said as Regina’s hand rested on the door handle.

Regina didn’t turn, presumably through trepidation at the knowledge of what Emma was referring to, “we can talk about anything you like, once you have been given a clean bill of health from the hospital,” Regina stated.

“I don’t need them to tell me what I’ve been feeling and hiding since my twenty-eight birthday,” Emma told Regina’s back, “and I don’t know what you think about that but I just wanted you to know because... hell... because life is short and I don’t want to hide anymore.”

Regina turned the door knob but made no move to open the door and Emma held her breath as she waited anxiously to see what, if anything, Regina would say.

“As I say,” Regina replied in almost a whisper, “we can talk once you are one hundred percent restored,” she said with finality, “I’ll make pancakes,” she finished as she opened the door and quickly left the room.

Chapter 24

Regina sat impatiently on a hard plastic chair in the hospital waiting room with a bored expression as she eyed a stack of tatty, well-read magazines with a critical eye.

Henry entered the waiting room and took the seat next to her, “anything?”

“No, in the minute you were in the bathroom there have been no updates,” Regina sighed before regarding him with narrow eyes, “did you wash your hands?”

“Yep,” Henry said and put his hand on her cheek so she could feel the just washed skin.

She leaned back to get away from the sweaty palm but she smiled at the action nonetheless as he lowered his hand with a cheeky grin, “what’s taking so long?”

“I presume they are looking for her brain, it may be a while longer yet,” Regina said with a small smile, appreciative of her own humour.

Henry chose not to answer, he knew Regina didn’t mean anything by the comment and even he had worked out that her sarcastic utterances were often used to hide her feelings on a subject.

He looked up at his adoptive mother with a smile, “you’re doing really well, Mom,” he told her with pride.

“Whatever do you mean?” Regina regarded him with a confused raised eyebrow.

“You know, being here, with your fear of doctors,” he explained.

“Oh I’m fine being in a hospital, Henry,” Regina told him, “I’ve spent quite a lot of time in the hospital, I’m on the board. I’ve brought you here

when you thought pennies were sweets,” she glared at him and he laughed. She’d never let him forget that, he’d been four at the time.

“The...” she hesitated, still not entirely comfortable with admitting her fears, “the problem is when I need medical assistance, when I know they want to see me. They can carve Miss Swan up like a thanksgiving turkey for all I care but I wouldn’t be able to enter an examination room to be seen personally.”

Henry considered this for a few moments and then silently took one of her hands that she rested in her lap in his and quietly held her hand supportively. They remained like that for several minutes until Doctor Whale walked into the waiting room with his hands in his pockets and a smile on his face.

“Regina,” he said cordially by way of greeting, they had settled their differences a while ago.

“Victor,” Regina replied with a politician’s smile, while they were no longer at war they certainly were not friends.

“She’s fine,” he told them, smiling at Henry’s relieved sigh.

“Are you sure?” Regina asked in surprise, “she had a concussion, she was confused.”

Victor nodded, “yes, she still has a lump on the back of her head,” he gestured with his hand, “and she still a little hazy but she’s recovering nicely. I’ve signed her off duty for a couple of days but at the moment she just needs three square meals and some sleep and she’ll be back to normal.”

“Cool,” Henry smiled happily, “you can make her lunch,” he addressed Regina, “you know, so she doesn’t skip meals.”

“Mmm,” Regina agreed distractedly and stood up, “Victor, may we have a word in private?”

The doctor nodded and gestured to an examination room, “Henry, I’ll be back in a moment, please wait here,” Regina told him as she crossed to the

examination room and stepped in.

Victor closed the door and folded his arms, “problem?”

“I just want to be sure you have checked everything thoroughly,” Regina said but then quickly clarified, “not that I think you’ve not done your job fully but I know brain injuries can be tricky.”

“Is there something specific that you’re worried about?” Victor asked.

“Yesterday evening she was... quite confused,” Regina struggled to explain.

“I see,” Victor nodded, “in her speech? Her manner?”

“Both,” Regina frowned, “she was saying things I don’t believe she would usually say, especially not to me. Is there any chance the concussion could have affected her that way? Made her say things she wouldn’t usually, things she didn’t necessarily mean?”

Victor scrunched up his face, “it’s hard to say, from my examination of her just now I’d say not. But then I’m not close enough to the Sheriff to know what unusual behaviour is for her and it would depend on the context of the conversations.”

“But is it possible?” Regina asked for clarity, “could the concussion make her say things she doesn’t mean? Confuse her...”

“Again,” Victor said, “it’s hard to say, though her concussion wasn’t that serious so I’d say probably not. It might have made her tongue a little looser but I don’t think she would be confused enough to say something fabricated.”

“I see,” Regina rubbed her forehead with a wince.

“Headache?” Victor asked.

“Yes,” Regina admitted, “watching over the Sheriff for twelve hours will do that to anyone.”

“She’ll need to be monitored for a few more hours yet,” Victor grinned, “I’d recommend dropping her on her parents.”

“The town needs a Sheriff,” Regina commented, “I don’t trust those idiots watching a toothpick.”

Victor nodded his agreement, while he had his issues with the Evil Queen he had more with Prince Charming and his opinionated righteousness.

“Victor,” Regina asked thoughtfully, “say someone, theoretically, had very severe headaches and you wanted to explore what was wrong... how would you go about doing that?”

Victor regarded her seriously, “well, I’d take a patient history first. Get information about any brain trauma that might have happened and then, dependent on that, I’d probably get a CT scan. Has Emma been suffering with severe headaches, she didn’t mention...”

“A CT scan, that’s like an x-ray of the brain?” Regina questioned.

“Yes, pretty much,” Victor agreed.

Regina could feel the calm slipping away and she needed to get out of there, Victor was standing in front of the only exit to the room with his arms crossed and she felt trapped and frightened. She nodded quickly, “very well, t-thank you,” she stuttered as she attempted to get around him to leave the room.

“Regina?” Victor asked, “is there anything wrong?”

“No, I just have things to do,” she explained hastily as she opened the door and quickly crossed the threshold into the safety of the waiting room and only began to relax when she saw Henry’s smiling face.

She turned to address a confused looking Victor, “is Miss Swan free to go?”

“Yes, she’s just signing a calendar for one of the porters,” Victor laughed, “she’ll be out soon.”

“She’s what?” Regina asked as she spun on her heel and marched through a set of double door and further into the hospital in search of the blonde. It didn’t take Regina long to locate the Sheriff who was surrounded by porters, nurses and even a couple of patients with a Sharpie pen in her hand as she signed copies of calendars that were being handed to her.

Regina hung back a second as she regarded the scene and attempted to identify the feeling that was fluttering hard in her chest, it was like the nervous panic attack she had just experienced with Whale but it was different. She wanted to rush into the group and break it up and drag Emma away from them and she leaned against the wall as she began to recognise her emotion, jealousy, flaring strongly.

“Mom?” Henry asked in concern as he came up beside her and placed his hand on her arm, “are you okay?”

She smiled down at Henry, her rock no matter what was happening around her and nodded, “I am now, Henry, I think I was just a little dizzy.”

Henry seemed happy with the explanation and turned to regard Emma and her fan club and grinned as he walked over and casually integrated himself with the group. Emma still hadn’t noticed Regina standing in the corridor watching them all with a hesitant countenance, unsure how or even if to get involved in the group.

Henry exited the small crowd with a big smile as he approached Regina with a copy of the calendar in his hand and thrust it into Regina’s hand, “look Mom, you haven’t seen February yet have you?”

Regina looked down uncertainly and looked at the February photograph that Emma starred in and found it very hard to not stare at the gloss image in her shaky hands. A clearly naked Emma was strategically and sparingly wrapped in yellow police tape with the words ‘crime scene’ in black, block capital letters on a repeated pattern, she was laughing and looking down at Pongo, Archie’s mischievous Dalmatian, who was holding the end of the tape in his mouth.

“Pongo wrapped her in tape,” Henry laughed as he pointed to the dog fondly.

Regina coughed to clear her throat, “yes, so I see, very funny,” she said as she swallowed hard. The owner of the signed calendar broke away from the group and Henry took the calendar from Regina’s hands and walked over to the porter to hand it back to him. At that moment Emma turned and saw Regina standing there and their eyes met and Emma winked at the brunette causing Regina to blush bright red.

“Henry, tell Emma I’ll meet her in the car,” Regina told him quickly, “I just need to get some air...”

Chapter 25

Emma watched Regina hurry off and attempted to wrap up the conversation she was having about the calendar, she hadn't really wanted to get involved but she knew the calendar was for charity and she felt she owed it to people to stop and talk. And the opportunity of signing the calendar when Regina was nearby was too good a chance to miss.

But now the woman had spun on her heel and left Emma wondered if it had been the best idea to attempt to antagonise Regina like that. She said her farewells and Henry approached her and she looked down at him expectantly.

“Mom’s waiting in the car,” he told her, seemingly not noticing his brunette mother’s bad mood.

“Well, let’s not keep her waiting,” Emma said with a smile and put her arm around his shoulder as they turned to leave. She was about to speak again when she looked up and saw Mary Margaret hurrying along a corridor towards the exit with her head down and a pensive look on her face.

“Hey,” Emma spoke up to greet her mother.

Mary Margaret’s head snapped up at the sound, “oh! Emma! Are you okay?”

“I’m fine,” Emma smiled, “Regina thought I should get checked out, but what are you doing here?”

Mary Margaret looked around, “is Regina here?”

“She’s waiting in the car,” Emma explained and got the impression that Mary Margaret was doing a typically bad job of trying to hush something up. She reached into her pocket and gave Henry some money, “Henry, could you get me a drink from the machine in the waiting room?”

“Sure,” Henry happily took the money knowing there was too much for a single drink and assumed that was permission to purchase himself something as well.

Once Henry was out of earshot Emma folded her arms and looked at Mary Margaret, “right, what is it?”

“Well,” Mary Margaret beamed happily, “I have news but Regina can’t know, not yet anyway.”

Emma had no idea why Regina wasn’t allowed to know the news but didn’t want to debate the issue before she herself had heard it, “sure,” she shrugged, “what’s the news.”

Mary Margaret blushed as she smiled, “I’m pregnant.”

Emma blinked in surprise, she’d not expected that but the logical side of her brain quickly understood that Prince Charming and Snow White would want to have another baby, one they could actually bring up.

“Emma?” Mary Margaret’s smile started to falter.

“That’s, that’s great news,” Emma quickly replied and ensured that her face only registered surprise and not the edge of bitterness that she felt, “wow, you caught me by surprise there!”

With a big smile Emma hugged her mother and held her tightly as different emotions warred in her mind.

“Oh I hope you’re as happy as we are,” Mary Margaret said, “I didn’t want to tell you like this but I couldn’t keep it a secret any longer. I’m six weeks along, we wanted to tell you together but...”

Emma pulled back but held Mary Margaret’s arms tightly, “it’s fine, I’m happy for you both, it’s great news.”

Mary Margaret breathed a sigh of relief and nodded happily, “you’ll have to look surprised when David tells you,” she joked.

“Oh I will,” Emma thought she’d still be surprised when that happened anyway, “but why not tell Regina?”

“Oh, yes,” Mary Margaret’s face dropped as she looked around the corridor and gently took Emma to one side to ensure they were not overhead, “of course I will tell Regina but I want to do it myself, when the time is right.”

Emma was confused, “why? You don’t think she’ll have any animosity towards the baby, surely?”

“Oh, no, nothing like that,” Mary Margaret shook her head, “it’s just... when Regina was married to my father... well, she had trouble carrying a baby to term. I was only young but I was aware that there were complications. She had miscarriages, more than one but I don’t know how many. The court physician was forever seeing her and I know she’s sensitive on the topic. We’ve come so far, I don’t want this to be what causes a relapse or something.”

Many things suddenly clicked into place in Emma’s mind and she simply nodded, “yeah, I know what you mean, best to tell her at the right time.”

“Exactly,” Mary Margaret sighed, happy that Emma understood her point of view, “she desperately wanted a child of her own. That’s why she’s always been so fiercely protective of Henry.”

“I’ll keep it quiet,” Emma promised, “just make sure you tell her soon, you don’t want it to accidentally get out because of some big mouth. You know how fast news travels in this small town.”

“Yes, I know, I’ve just got to find the right time and the right way,” Mary Margaret said as she nervously worried her bottom lip.

“We’ll figure it out together,” Emma said with a supportive squeeze of Mary Margaret’s hand, “anyway, I better go or Regina will wonder where I am.”

“I can drive you home,” Mary Margaret offered as she jangled her keys in the air.

“Ah, I... promised Henry I’d spend some time with him,” Emma shrugged her shoulders.

“Isn’t Henry helping Ruby today?” Mary Margaret frowned as they both started to walk towards the waiting room.

“Yes, but... he... wants to spend some time with me first, before he does that,” Emma hoped it didn’t sound as made up to her mother’s ears as it did to her own.

“Okay, we’ll see you later though, yes?” Mary Margaret asked with a smile.

Emma briefly considered that she would have gotten away with so much as a child if Mary Margaret had raised her, “absolutely,” Emma smiled.

Henry came over with a can of drink and pockets bulging with the most candy and chocolate he could buy with the remaining money he’d had and Emma rolled her eyes, Regina was going to flip.

“See you later, Henry,” Mary Margaret waved as she exited the hospital.

Henry called out his goodbyes as Emma fussed with his pockets, “Jesus, Kid, if you’re going to empty the whole vending machine at least be subtle about it.”

When she was happy that Henry didn’t look like he’d raided a chocolate factory she nodded for him to follow him into the car park to meet Regina.

“Is your mom okay?” Emma asked casually.

“Sure,” Henry shrugged.

“Enlightening,” Emma mumbled with a shake of the head.

“She was a bit worried about you,” Henry continued as he thought more about it, “but she was okay being at the hospital. She said she only gets scared if she knows that they are going to examine her.”

Emma nodded her understanding as she saw the black Mercedes waiting for them with the engine running and Regina looking in the opposite direction in an attempt to seem casual. With a smirk Emma opened the passenger door and stood to one side to allow Henry to tip the seat forward and clamber ungracefully into the back of the car.

She pushed the seat back into position and got in herself, “sorry about that,” she told Regina who was still refusing to look at her.

“Of course you have to tend to your legions of fans,” she mumbled before speaking up, “belt, Henry.”

Emma smirked to herself, she may be in the dog house but at least she knew that Regina was feeling jealous.

Chapter 26

Despite Regina's obvious mood it was quickly decided that Emma was to return to 108 Mifflin Street to recuperate further and for Regina to prepare her a more substantial lunch than she would find for herself.

Emma didn't have much say in the matter as Regina had clearly already decided all of this while waiting for them to come out of the hospital and before long found herself back on Regina's comfortable sofa. Henry sat with her while Regina fetched some refreshments, "she's acting weird," Henry commented with a small frown.

"I don't think she got much sleep last night, I kinda woke her up," Emma admitted, "and yesterday was pretty stressful for her."

"Should I stay instead of helping Ruby?" Henry asked.

"I think you should go, Ruby needs your cute smile to convince people to part with their hard-earned cash," Emma winked, "I'll stay and watch your Mom."

Henry regarded her for a moment suspiciously, "why?"

"Why what?" Emma asked though realising from Henry's look that he was already onto her.

"Why are you going to stay and watch out for Mom?" Henry asked.

"Err, well," Emma wished this conversation had come up before she had been cleared from the effects of a concussion so she could blame her lack of clarity on that, "I... I'm worried about her," she admitted.

Henry stared at her for a few moments as he considered the likelihood of that being the truth, "do you like her?"

It was an innocent enough question, phrased in an innocent enough way but Emma knew Henry better than that. He had spent years growing up in a town where things didn't make sense, he'd spent a lot of time analysing and extrapolating data and coming up with theories no matter how bizarre. He'd cracked the riddle of the curse with nothing but a fairy tale book, he was objective, methodical and damned persistent.

"I want to help her," Emma said equally.

"You like her," Henry smiled, immediately seeing through the deflection but then his smile turned serious and then into a questioning frown, "Emma," he paused as his brain worked overtime.

"Henry, let's not talk about this now," Emma pleaded, concerned that Regina would be standing right outside the door listening to every single word.

"You like her," Henry's eyes shone and he looked at her in wonder, "Ruby was right!"

It was Emma's turn to be shocked, "Ruby? What does Ruby have to do with this?!"

"She said you liked girls, like my sports teacher Miss Woods," Henry said quietly as his mind put pieces together at a fast rate.

"That... that doesn't mean I have a thing for your mom," Emma whispered tersely as she crossed the room to check Regina wasn't near the door.

"But you do," Henry smiled, "or you wouldn't act like this, you'd be like, laughing or something. You like Mom!"

"Please stop saying that," Emma fell into an arm chair and put her head in her hands.

"This is so cool," Henry said excitedly.

"Is it, Kid?" Emma asked, maintaining her defeated pose.

“Yeah,” Henry nodded happily, “you’ll win her over, the Saviour and the Evil Queen, that’s probably what’s supposed to happen. Happy endings for everyone.”

Emma’s mind made a quick pit stop in the gutter as she mentally envisaged giving Regina a happy ending before she sat up and looked at Henry seriously, “Henry, just... please... don’t get involved, okay? This is grownup stuff, I know you’ll mean well but please let me handle this, okay?”

“Okay,” Henry agreed easily.

“Okay?” Emma frowned at him, there was no way that her genes and Regina’s parenting skills would result in an okay after that conversation.

He stood up and shrugged, “sure,” he walked towards the door before turning back to regard Emma, “you’ve got twenty four hours to ask her on a date or I’ll tell her you like her and I don’t think I’ll be as good at it as you will.”

He turned and Emma stood up to run after him just as Regina walked towards the study with a tray containing tea and cake, “Emma?”

Emma stood to one side and let Regina into the room, “sorry, I was... just...” she watched Henry walk across the hallway casting her a smirk as he did and she realised what a monster she had helped create, this was exactly the kind of trick she’d pull on someone else.

“Fascinating,” Regina sighed as she placed the tray on the coffee table and sat primly on the edge of the sofa. Emma came back into the room and flopped down into the armchair and anxiously looked up at the door occasionally to see if Henry was going to make a return.

She looked up as she realised that Regina’s eyes were upon her and she frowned as she grasped she had missed something that Regina had said to her, “sorry?”

Regina took a deep breath and held up a mug of tea for Emma to take and mumbled, “I’m wondering if Whale should have admitted you for further

tests, you don't look well.”

“I’m sorry,” Emma took the mug, “I’m just distracted, nothing concussion-based I promise.”

Regina regarded her carefully, “well, then perhaps Whale is competent at his job after all.”

“He is, I’m fine,” Emma nodded.

A moment of silence passed between them and Emma’s eyes fell to the cuff on Regina’s wrist, “Regina, the cuff...”

Regina was cutting a slice of cake, a large slice that Emma presumed would shortly be coming her way, “what of it?”

“How do you get it off?” Emma asked hesitantly.

“I don’t,” Regina replied as she handed the plate to Emma, “I can’t remove it myself.”

“So, what happens?” Emma pushed.

“Well, magic will need to be used to remove it,” Regina said as she regarded the cuff with disdain, “last time,” she hesitated briefly, “last time your parents had the bluebottle remove it.”

“So we’d need Blue to remove it?” Emma didn’t like needing her, for some reason Emma had never really trusted the leader of the fairies.

“Or Gold,” Regina shrugged, “or you, I suppose.”

“Me?” Emma questioned.

“You have magic,” Regina said plainly as she picked up a cup and saucer she had filled with tea for herself and distractedly sipped from the cup.

“You put the cuff on with no plan on how to get it off again?” Emma questioned with confusion.

“I suppose I did,” Regina said softly.

“Why?” Emma couldn’t fathom why Regina would put herself in that position with no escape plan.

Regina’s eyes flicked up towards the door as if trying to ascertain if Henry were there before she leaned forward, “I nearly killed you yesterday, Emma, I can’t take that kind of risk again. And,” she paused as she sat up straight and took another sip of tea, “before long the decision wouldn’t have been mine anyway. At least this way I was in control of my own destiny.”

Emma blinked, “you still think we’d force you to wear it...”

“Maybe not you,” Regina admitted, “but the second the general riffraff knew that I wasn’t in full control of my magic that would be the only logical course of action for your parents.”

“They would never,” Emma breathed.

“Oh, they would,” Regina laughed softly, “to protect their people, of course they would.”

“No... I...” Emma paused and took a breath, “you know what... I’m not going to argue the point with you. We’re going to agree to disagree, it’s what mature adults do,” she nodded, “but I need you to know that if you want that cuff off I will help you. You just need to say the word and I’ll do it, if I can,” she added.

Regina looked at her hesitantly before looking at the steam gently rising from her cup and another silence began to build between them.

Emma took a couple of bites of cake as she considered her words carefully, eventually she knew she had to break the silence or Regina would happily sit there mute.

“You told me we could talk about anything I liked,” Emma said quietly, “once I got a clean bill of health... which I now have.”

She didn't miss the shake of Regina's hand as she placed the cup and saucer back on the coffee table, "that I did," the brunette replied.

"I want to talk about last night," Emma said in her best grownup and serious tone, she didn't want to give Regina the impression that she was being flippant about her emotions.

"It's all right, Miss Swan," Regina smiled, "you were concussed, confused..."

"No, I was fine," Emma said firmly, "I meant what I said, I've wanted to kiss you before and I don't regret kissing you, maybe the timing could have been better or I could have... I dunno... taken you to dinner or something first," she mashed the cake around her plate with her fork as she rambled on, "but I wouldn't change it."

Regina stared at her with that damn beautiful but completely unreadable expression, shock was the only evident emotion on her face.

Realising that Regina was going to contribute nothing to the conversation until absolutely forced to do so Emma continued, "I don't know what your feelings about that is, about me... the fact that you didn't run to the bathroom and gargle with bleach makes me think that you don't find the idea too revolting."

Regina's stare remained fixed and her mouth remained firmly closed and Emma couldn't take the silence so carried on again, "but then you're not exactly giving me any signals so I'm really working blind here... but... maybe we could do stuff sometime?"

"Stuff?" Regina sounded almost scandalised at the idea.

Emma realised her mistake, "I mean dinner or something... stuff as in dating... not as in stuff," she emphasised the word, "not that stuff is off the menu, I like stuff," she saw Regina flush and immediately changed track again, "but I mean a date, I'm doing the worst possible job of asking you out."

“I...” Regina drifted off and Emma stared at her, desperately hoping the brunette would break her silence and give her some kind of clue as to what was going on in her mind.

“I don’t think that’s a good idea,” Regina finally said, “I’m not ready for anything like that...”

Emma frowned, “not ready? You eat don’t you?”

“It’s not the dinner, it’s the,” Regina sighed as she gestured with her free hand, “the being together... I’ve never been... good at that. I’m not partner material.”

Emma smiled a little, while Regina was trying to shoot her down she was being gentle about it and at no time had she said she wasn’t interested in Emma specifically.

“Partner material?” Emma chuckled, “it’s a date, Regina, not marriage.”

Regina stiffened slightly at the word and Emma was about to speak again to attempt to soothe over her faux pas when Regina spoke up, “I’ve never dated.”

Not for the first time Emma found herself suddenly realising something that she subsequently thought should have been obvious to her. Of course she’d never dated, she’d been forced into marriage and then became the Evil Queen where, Emma supposed, dating opportunities were limited. Then there was the curse and then... she looked at Regina and smiled, “great!”

Regina blinked as she questioned, “great?”

“Yeah,” Emma beamed as she stabbed another piece of cake with her fork, “if you’ve never dated then I’m guaranteed to be the best date you’ve ever had.”

Chapter 27

Any reply Regina had been due to deliver was stopped by Henry's reappearance in the room, "Mom," he addressed Regina with a big smile that suggested he wanted something.

"Yes, dear?" Regina looked softly at him, partly happy for the interruption into what was turning into an awkward conversation for her.

"Is it okay if I eat lunch at the diner? Then Ruby and I can get going straight after her shift finishes," Henry asked with his little eyelashes batting innocently.

Emma turned around in her armchair so she could regard Henry without Regina seeing her and stared daggers at Henry for being so obvious.

"Oh, of course," Regina said as she mentally rejigged her plans for the day.

"Cool," Henry grinned and left the room again.

Emma slowly turned around to face Regina again as she considered how she would get Henry back.

"When?"

Emma looked up at Regina with a frown which in turn made Regina blush and quickly stand up and walk over to her desk to fuss with some paperwork.

"Oh!" Emma suddenly caught on, "you're... you're saying yes?"

"I'm regretting it already," Regina mumbled as she fiddled with some pieces of paper and a pair of scissors.

"When are you free?" Emma couldn't stop smiling.

“Well my action-packed diary is clearly bursting at the seams,” Regina deadpanned without looking up, “what with work and all the social engagements I don’t think I have much availability.”

“How about Monday?” Emma asked, ignoring Regina’s dialogue.

“That’s tomorrow,” Regina told her as she looked up with a frown.

“I’m worried you might change your mind,” Emma shrugged.

“I could still change my mind by tomorrow,” Regina pointed out as she continued to cut the piece of paper.

“True, but I hope you won’t,” Emma admitted, “I’d suggest tonight but I need to go home and shower and change and Mary Margaret will wonder what’s going on if I stop here two nights in a row.”

Regina threw her scissors back into her desk drawer with a little more force than was strictly necessary, “ah, I see,” she muttered before loudly slamming the drawer closed.

Emma jumped at the action and winced, she’d said something wrong and now she needed to figure out what it was and soothe it over as quickly as possible. She had a feeling this would be a frequent occurrence in any relationship she might have with Regina.

“See what?” Emma asked gingerly.

Regina picked up some adhesive putty and began kneading a small amount between her fingers to make it pliable and sticky, “I’m to be your secret,” she whispered.

Emma jumped to her feet, “no! No, not at all!”

Regina looked up in surprise, she hadn’t expected the Saviour to be so determined in her denial.

“Unless... unless you want to keep it a secret?” Emma answered Regina’s look of surprise in more confusion, desperately trying to appease the

brunette.

“What do you want?” Regina asked as she angrily manipulated the adhesive putty.

“If you agree to go out with me I’d probably want to scream it from the clock tower,” Emma admitted with a goofy smile.

Regina paused in her violent attack on the putty and looked surprised and confused, Emma had a suspicion that no one had ever said anything like that to the beautiful former Queen and would bet a month’s salary that Regina was struggling to know what to say to that.

After a few moments Regina picked up the piece of paper from her desk that she had cut and began applying a small amount of adhesive putty to each corner of the paper as she delicately asked, “you’re... going to tell your parents?”

“Yes,” Emma said as if it were obvious.

“And if they... don’t approve?” Regina asked in an even softer tone.

Emma shrugged, “don’t care, they’ll be fine though.”

Regina nodded, more from a need to reply in some form than from actually agreeing with Emma. She picked up her piece of paper and walked over to where the calendar hung and David’s face looked at her and covered up the photograph with the piece of paper and firmly pressed each corner down to obscure the photo but still display the calendar below.

Emma burst out laughing at the action and Regina turned and regarded her with a superior expression, “I may be on better terms with your parents these days but that does not extend to having to feel the eyes of your father watching me as I work. Nor do I wish to see his hairy chest or his... sword.”

Emma calmed her laughing and nodded her understanding, “yeah, I get it.”

“So,” Regina clasped her hands in front of her and regarded Emma, the desk in between them was clearly no accident as Emma could see Regina

attempting to gain the upper hand during this awkward conversation, “Monday?”

“Monday,” Emma smiled, “dinner?”

“Henry...” Regina started.

“Can be left alone for a couple of hours,” Emma pointed out, “or he can stay at my parents, or they could watch him here? Or Ruby?”

“I don’t want to uproot him for the evening,” Regina said as she looked down at her clasped hands.

“I’ll ask Mary Margaret to come over here and watch him, would that be okay?” Emma questioned and was happy when Regina gave a small nod.

“Great, dinner at seven, I’ll pick you up at quarter to?” Emma asked.

“Pick me up?” Regina asked, “in the yellow death trap?”

“Yes, unless you want me to bring the cruiser?” Emma joked, a little wounded that Regina hated her beloved Bug so much.

Regina just gave her a look in reply and Emma smiled, “not to be rude but do you mind if I bail on lunch?”

Regina looked like she was about to argue so Emma continued, “I promise I will eat something healthy and substantial but I just want to go home and have a shower and rest. I feel pretty icky and looking at you looking all perfect and gorgeous isn’t helping,” she joked.

Regina blushed and Emma’s heart soared at the adorable creature in front of her, “very well, as long as you promise to not skip lunch, I know you have a tendency to do that, I have my spies,” Regina smiled.

“Yeah, he’s called Henry and his mouth doesn’t stop,” Emma grinned.

“What about Henry?” Regina asked with a sudden flash of nerves, “what do we tell him?”

“He... kinda already knows,” Emma said as she shuffled her feet nervously.

Regina frowned, “I only said yes a few minutes ago, how can he know?”

“I mean he knows I like you,” Emma clarified, “he told me I have to make a move or he’ll tell you my secret,” she chuckled.

Regina smiled, “that boy is getting worse and worse.”

“Thank God,” Emma said, “or I might not have gotten the courage up to ask you out. It took being concussed and disorientated to get the courage to kiss you. Which, I reiterate, I totally wanted to do, being concussed just knocked down the barriers that were preventing me from doing so.”

The flush on Regina’s cheeks was getting redder and Emma decided to not push her luck and make Regina too uncomfortable so indicated the door with her hand, “so, I better...”

“Oh, yes, of course,” Regina said as she took a tentative step forward with the intention of seeing the blonde out.

“Thank you for looking after me,” Emma said sincerely, “and not killing me,” she joked.

Regina smiled in spite of the seriousness of the situation, “you’re welcome, Miss Swan.”

“I’ll see myself out,” Emma said, keen to leave the awkwardness of the situation and get away from the mental images she had of crossing the room and kissing Regina right there and then, “I’ll see you tomorrow at quarter to seven.”

Regina gave her a small smile and nodded as she watched Emma leave the room.

Chapter 28

Emma was relieved when she got back to the apartment and found it empty. She quickly text Mary Margaret and received confirmation that her mother would be in an important meeting for at least the next hour. Which gave Emma plenty of time to have the long shower that she had been dreaming off since being questioned and prodded in the hospital that morning. She was pleased that she'd be blessed with a body that seemed to rarely sweat, which meant that she didn't often have to be concerned about body odour, only if she had been exercising or doing something particularly strenuous.

However that didn't mean she hadn't felt uncomfortable and like she desperately needed to get out of her clothes and into a shower. Washing her hair had turned into a bit of a minefield when she realised that the bump on her head was still supersensitive but she had managed to get through it and then stood under a hot stream of water as she tried to relax and take in everything that had happened. Her mind was racing and she caught a glimpse of herself in the bathroom mirror and noted that she seemed to have a permanent smile etched on her face.

Once she was out of the shower she set about drying her hair and whistled a random tune loudly as she spent a little more time than usual adjusting her natural curls. After that she got dressed into the clothes she had brought with her into the bathroom, the black jeans that she knew made her backside look divine and the low cut though insanely comfortable light grey sweater.

After one last look at herself in the mirror she was satisfied that she looked as presentable as she came and opened the bathroom door, still whistling happily until she turned and saw Mary Margaret sitting at the dining room table with two mugs of steaming coffee waiting.

“Okay, spill,” Mary Margaret said with a knowing smile.

“What?” Emma tried to look innocent.

“You’re glowing with happiness,” Mary Margaret pointed out, “and whistling.”

Emma took the chair opposite her mother and pulled one of the mugs towards her as she casually shrugged, “just happy to be home and get clean I guess?”

“It’s Regina, isn’t it?” Mary Margaret asked with an expressionless face.

Emma could feel the blush growing in her cheeks and hoped that Mary Margaret would think of it as an after effect from a hot shower.

“What do you mean?” Emma asked as she took a sip of coffee and stared at her mother over the rim of the cup.

“It is, it’s Regina,” Mary Margaret confirmed to herself and shook her head in despair as she sipped her coffee.

“Wha...” Emma began.

“Oh, cut the butter wouldn’t melt routine,” Mary Margaret told her, “you’ve looked at Regina like she’s the last bacon sandwich at Granny’s breakfast buffet for months now.”

“Bacon sandwich?” Emma asked affronted.

“You do love those sandwiches, Emma,” Mary Margaret pointed out.

“Are you really comparing Regina to a bacon sandwich?” Emma asked in surprise.

“No, I’m comparing the way you salivate,” Mary Margaret said sweetly and laughed as Emma choked on her coffee slightly.

“So... you knew?” Emma asked in surprise.

“I had an inkling,” Mary Margaret nodded, “I didn’t know if it was just a physical attraction or something more.”

“And... you’re okay with this?” Emma continued.

Mary Margaret put her mug down gently on the table and looked at Emma seriously, “Emma, I know it’s taken a while for us to... fully understand and grasp our relationship but I know in my heart that you are my daughter. And all I want for you is to be happy, I would never stand in between you and happiness. I’ll admit I was a little concerned when I first thought you were interested in Regina but over time I’ve seen Regina change back into the woman I knew from when I was younger. That Regina was a good, kind, sensitive and loving person and...” she smiled, “if the smile on your face and the sound of your whistling in the bathroom is anything to go by, she makes you very happy.”

Emma blushed and smiled, “I’m still kind of figuring it all out for myself but... yes, I’m happy.”

“But I will say one thing,” Mary Margaret said firmly, “I don’t need to hear any details, she was my step mother after all!”

“Oh, I wouldn’t! Don’t worry! You are MY mother after all,” Emma laughed.

“However,” Mary Margaret grinned, “I’m still open to some juicy gossip... naturally...”

Emma laughed, “naturally! Well, err, we have a date...”

Mary Margaret clapped her hands together excitedly, “who asked who? When’s the date? Oh, how exiting! What are you going to do?”

“Whoa, slow down,” Emma put her hand up to prevent her mother from passing out from lack of oxygen, “I asked her... obviously,” she rolled her eyes, “it’s tomorrow evening and I’ve not quite planned it yet because she only said yes a couple of hours ago. But, I was wondering if you’d mind watching Henry?”

“Sure, he is welcome to come over anytime...” Mary Margaret started but drifted off as Emma started to shake her head, “oh, you mean watch Henry at

Regina's house?"

Emma silently nodded her head.

"And Regina's okay with that?" Mary Margaret asked, "me being in her house?"

"Yeah, she seemed to prefer that to uprooting Henry," Emma answered, "she... was worried about how you and David would react to... us dating..."

"Oh, I'm not surprised," Mary Margaret nodded, "shall I say something?"

"No!" Emma blurted before starting again, "I mean, no I don't think that's a good idea. She's... well, she's Regina and she's pretty sensitive about things. Everything is like walking on eggshells at the moment so I don't want there to be any misunderstandings that send her off into a mood."

Mary Margaret nodded her understanding, "so, babysitting Henry tomorrow, what time?"

"I'm picking Regina up at quarter to seven if that's okay?" Emma asked.

"Sure, it will be fun to spend some quality time with Henry, David's going out with some of the guys," Mary Margaret rolled her eyes, "anyway, where are you taking Regina on your date?"

She practically squealed the word date and Emma chuckled, "I don't know, I've not really thought about it. She says she's never dated before so I don't even know what her expectations are."

"Well, it depends on how Regina spent the twenty eight years under the curse," Mary Margaret commented.

"What do you mean?" Emma frowned.

"Well, if I'd cast the curse and I had to live through twenty eight years of the same damn thing... I'd watch a hell of a lot of movies, television series and read every book I could get my hands on," Mary Margaret pointed out, "now, I like romantic fluff, as you know, if Regina's had a constant diet of

Hollywood romance and bodice ripper novels then she might be expecting a lot.”

Emma felt her mouth go dry at the prospect, she’d been thinking that Regina would be naïve to the whole dating process and no matter what Emma did she’d look like God’s gift to dating. But she had to admit Mary Margaret had a point, if Regina had spent all those years watching romantic movies then her expectations of a date, her first real date, would be off the charts.

Mary Margaret saw Emma’s panic building and quickly spoke up, “but this is Regina we’re talking about, she’s never really been into that kind of stuff so maybe she just spent the years learning to cook and sew and... doing paperwork.”

Emma looked up at her mother with renewed anxiety, “well, you knew her! And you suggested it, do you think she has been watching all that mushy stuff? What do you think I should do for the date?”

“Err, I don’t know,” Mary Margaret frowned, “dating wasn’t really the thing back home, I’ve never been on a date either!”

“But you’ve read all those books, what do they do in them?” Emma asked.

“Oh, Honey, there’s not a lot of dating in them, that’s why I read them,” Mary Margaret laughed, “look, forget I said anything, Regina has never been on a date and she’s not exactly had the best of luck when it’s come to romance so whatever you decide will be perfect.”

“I need a proper plan,” Emma declared, practically to herself, “penne arrabiata at the Italian place is not going to cut it. We need the full package.”

“What’s the full package?” Mary Margaret asked with intrigue.

“I have no idea but I have a day and a half to figure it out,” Emma smiled.

Chapter 29

Emma opened the door to Granny's and breathed a sigh of relief as she saw the two people she was looking for sitting in a booth. With a polite smile to the people who were walking out of the diner she quickly made her way to the booth and sat down on the empty bench and looked up at Henry and Ruby.

"Hey Hen," she smiled at Henry briefly before looking at Ruby, "Rubes, I need your help."

The pair were fussing with papers and lists and Ruby had a massive grin on her face, "yeah, Henry told me about your date with Regina."

Emma looked at Henry, "you know?"

Henry nodded as he took a sip of a large, cream-topped hot chocolate, "sure, Mom told me."

Emma stared at Henry for a moment before shaking her head and deciding to go back to her original reason for arriving in the diner, "Ruby," she addressed the waitress, "what's the best date you've ever been on?"

Henry rolled his eyes and shook his head as she started to doodle on the back of an order form while Ruby rested her head on her hand and started to remember the countless dates she'd been on.

"Well, ones we can, like, talk about now," she subtlety indicated Henry with a tilt of the head before continuing, "I've been to La Mer, the posh place at the of Stone Street a couple of times. Their food is to die for! Oh and one time we went to a psychic and I got my fortune told. Oh and then there was the date we hung out in his dad's garage, he was in a band, and he played his guitar and made a song for me."

Emma nodded as she took all the details in, "well, maybe La Mer might be a good idea, but I don't play the guitar and I don't think Regina would want to go to a psychic..."

She drifted off as she saw Henry looking at her and shaking his head, “Henry?”

“I know I’m just a kid but she is my Mom,” he muttered, obviously a bit despondent that Emma would ask Ruby for advice before him.

“Sorry, Kid,” Emma apologised, “it’s just that Ruby has been on dates before.”

“Fine,” Henry shrugged, “take her to La Mer,” he bent over to concentrate on his doodles, “your funeral,” he mumbled.

“She doesn’t like La Mer?” Emma quizzed.

Henry shrugged and ignored her and Emma let out a sigh as she shared a look with Ruby before shuffling a little in her seat so she was directly opposite Henry.

“Sorry Henry,” she said softly, “you’re right, you know Regina better than anyone I just didn’t think you’d want to get involved in planning my date with her.”

“Are you kidding me?” Henry looked up, “if you do what Ruby suggests you’ll never get a second date!” Ruby looked affronted but Henry continued anyway, “I’m invested in the success of your date,” he said officially and Emma smiled at the way he spoke like Regina sometimes.

“Why?” Emma grinned at him.

“Because if you do a good job then we might be a family,” Henry explained, “the three of us together and that would be amazing.”

“Oh,” Emma shared a small panicked look with Ruby, “look, Henry, there’s no guarantee that anything will come from this and I don’t want you to be disappointed if things don’t work out. Sometimes people just don’t fit well together, you know?”

“I know,” Henry nodded as he changed pen and started colouring in his doodle, “but if you want to be in with a chance you won’t take her to La

Mer.”

Emma smiled as she picked up a pen and turned over an order sheet and started doodling something herself, “so, what would you recommend, Henry?”

Henry concentrated on not going over the lines as he explained his line of reasoning, “Mom was a Queen, right? She’s had loads of fancy food in her life and she’s rich so if she wanted to eat out at fancy restaurants then she would, right? But ever since I’ve lived with her the only times she has eaten out at a nice restaurant has been for work. She cooks better than any of those places could and she really likes cooking so she’d probably be thinking she could do better anyway.”

Emma considered that and nodded, “that makes sense,” she agreed, “so, what should I do?”

Henry paused in his colouring in and glanced up at Ruby and Ruby grinned as she knew she was being dismissed, “let me just go and get something from the office,” she said as she exited the booth with a small chuckle.

Once she was gone Henry looked at Emma, “some people in Storybrooke still don’t really like Mom.”

Emma looked at the departing waitress, “Henry, Ruby...”

“Not Ruby,” Henry clarified, “but other people. If you take Mom on a date somewhere in Storybrooke or somewhere where there are a lot of people she’s going to feel uncomfortable and she’ll go all Evil Queen on you.”

Emma smiled that Regina’s sarcastic defensiveness had somewhere along the way had been rebranded as being Evil Queen.

“So you think I should take her out of Storybrooke?” Emma asked.

“Or somewhere quiet,” Henry shrugged.

“Some people don’t like being taken somewhere secluded for a first date,” Emma told Henry seriously.

“Mom won’t care,” Henry shrugged, “she knows you. Mom’s never really had any friends and she’s never had any boyfriends or girlfriends so we kinda always do things I like. I think she’s forgotten what she likes doing for herself, except riding.”

“What kind of things do you think she likes?” Emma asked, “not something that you think she likes because you like it.”

Henry considered that for a moment, “she loves watching the sunset and I think Storybrooke is on the coast because she likes boats. There’s a beach behind the ridge and she goes there sometimes, she likes hiking in the forest,” Henry paused as understanding washed over him and he smiled, “I think she likes simple things, like when she was a girl back in the Enchanted Forest, picnics and walks and talking and stuff.”

Emma frowned, “okay, well, I’m seeing her at seven at night so the sun will have set and it will be too cold to go walking or out on a boat... any other ideas?”

Henry thought about it for a moment and then a grin washed over his face as he nodded and leaned forward and started to whisper to Emma.

Chapter 30

Regina looked down at the text message on her phone again and frowned.

‘Dress casual’

Emma had sent it to her around midday and nothing else since. She had no idea what casual meant or what they indicated that they would be doing that evening. She couldn’t bring herself to call it a date she felt too old and too out of sorts to be going on a date.

Henry on the other hand was happy to call it a date, repeatedly. He sat at the breakfast bar in the kitchen eating the macaroni and cheese that she’d made for him while smiling incessantly and asking questions.

“So what are you going to wear?” Henry asked.

“Something casual,” Regina showed him the screen of her phone.

“Cool, will you though?” Henry questioned as she broke apart the cheesy pasta to allow it to cool down.

“Will I what?” Regina frowned.

“Will you wear casual clothes?” Henry asked, “you’re not very good with casual clothes, you always dress up.”

Regina was about to argue but realised he was right, she wasn’t very good with casual. She had been taught from a young age that you needed to dress correctly for every occasion and as a young woman the only weapon she had was looking good. Every time she ventured out of the door she knew people would be looking at her and she wanted to make sure she always looked her best, it was another layer of her defence mechanism.

“What do you suggest I wear?” Regina asked him as she wiped down the counter that had already been wiped clean several times.

“Jeans,” Henry nodded.

“Jeans?” Regina looked up in surprise. Of course she owned jeans, everyone had been through that phase but she hardly ever wore them.

“Jeans,” Henry confirmed, “comfortable, not too hot and not too cold, good for whatever you end up doing or wherever you go.”

Regina regarded him with narrow eyes, “you know...”

“Know what?” Henry casually took another bite of his dinner.

“You know what we’re doing this evening,” Regina said as she leaned on her elbows and regarded him suspiciously.

“On your date?” Henry quizzed, loving the word.

“Tell me,” she demanded, her voice dropping to a deeper octave.

“Err... no,” Henry grinned without a trace of fear.

“Tell me or I’ll ground you,” she threatened.

“No, you won’t,” Henry shook his head, “and had anyone ever told you that you catch my flies with honey?”

“Henry!” Regina stood up quickly and put her hand on her hips.

“Mom, you’ll love it, it’s nothing to be scared of,” Henry told her as he reached for another slice of handmade garlic bread.

“I’m not scared,” Regina told him and when he gave her a disbelieving look she amended, “I’m apprehensive of Miss Swan’s idea of a date. Obviously it’s dinner but casualwear would suggest we’ll be eating in that awful pizzeria.”

“It’s not dinner,” Henry shook his head.

“But...” Regina was thoroughly confused now.

“You’ll be eating but that’s not the date,” Henry told her.

“I’m confused,” Regina finally admitted.

“You’ll love it,” Henry told her, “I steered Emma away from anything you wouldn’t like but she came up with this on her own and you are going to love it, trust me.”

If anything the reassurance confused her more but she knew Henry well enough to trust him and to know that she wouldn’t get anything else out of him. With resignation she trudged out of the kitchen and up the stairs to get ready.

At twenty minutes to seven Regina was dressed and ready and pacing the hallway in concern, concern at the date and concern at leaving Henry for the evening. She wore tight-fitting black jeans and a white t-shirt with a thin light grey cardigan over the top and knee-high black boots. Henry watched her from his position on the stairs with a grin, “it will be fine, Mom.”

Regina was about to answer when the doorbell sounded and she froze in terror before looking through to the living room at the wall mounted clock and muttering, “she’s early.”

She turned to face Henry but he had already bounded towards the front door and opened it to let Mary Margaret and Emma in. Mary Margaret smiled warmly at Regina like it was any other day and not like she was about to let her only daughter go on a date with a woman who had spent years trying to kill her.

“Regina,” she said by way of greeting.

“Snow,” Regina nodded her head, suddenly very unsure how to act around the woman.

Emma looked at Regina with a big smile but then a studious look, “nope, you’ll need another jumper, something fleecy,” she announced.

Regina frowned, “what are we doing? It would help if I knew!”

“It’s a surprise but I don’t want you complaining about the cold so go and get another jumper,” Emma told her.

Regina balked a little at being told what to do but for some reason her legs were already leading her away and up the stairs. She’d examined Emma’s outfit of the ubiquitous tight jeans, boots, thick lumberjack-style shirt and a fleece tied around her waist by the arms.

It gave her no idea of what they would be doing that evening but she knew for damn sure they weren’t going to La Mer. A few moments later she returned with a dark forest green zip up fleece that she really had to dig into her closet to find. She drowned Mary Margaret in instructions on how to care for Henry for the next three to four hours and, with a pull on the arm from Emma and a shove from Henry she was out of the door.

Emma opened the passenger door to the bug for her and she got in and frowned at the brown paper bags that lined the dashboard. When Emma got in she saw Regina’s confusion and smiled, “we’re going to have to eat on the way, or we’ll not get there in time.”

“Get where in time?” Regina asked with exasperation.

“It’s a surprise, don’t worry, you’ll like it,” Emma grinned.

Emma noticed Regina stiffen at the remark so quickly picked up the bags from the dashboard, “it’s Granny’s, I know it’s not fine dining but you like her cooking so I took a gamble on the chicken salad and the apple juice, Ruby says that’s kinda your usual?”

Regina nodded and took one of the bags from Emma’s hands, “is it usual to eat takeout from diner in a car for a date?”

Emma laughed as she put the other bags in the back and started driving, “there’s no usual when it comes to dates but I’d say this isn’t very common. Just to confirm, you can cross the town line right? Without your magic?”

Regina regarded Emma curiously, “we’re leaving Storybrooke?”

“If that’s okay?” Emma asked before she repeated, “can you leave the town?”

Regina nodded, “yes, it’s safe for me to leave the town, where are we going?”

“I told you, it’s a surprise,” Emma grinned.

“I don’t like surprises, they make me feel threatened,” Regina admitted.

Emma faltered for a moment, it was rare that Regina was so honest and especially when it came to admitting a weakness and especially when she was admitting it to Emma of all people.

“In that case I’ll tell you now,” Emma smiled brightly as she drove the bug up the road towards the edge of town, “but make sure you eat because when we get there you won’t get a chance to eat.”

Regina unfolded a bag and picked up the takeaway salad and cutlery and set about preparing to eat.

“It will involve deceit,” Emma laughed, “but that’s what you get for agreeing to go on a date with an ex-con.”

Regina grinned at that, “are we going to rob someone?”

“No, you’re too green for that,” Emma smiled, “maybe on the second or third date. No, where we’re going you need to pretend you are the owner of our stables and you’re looking into a new project.”

“What kind of project?” Regina interrupted.

“Well, I was getting to that,” Emma grinned at Regina’s impatience, “we’re going to a stables just on the edge of the neighbouring town. Have you ever heard of equine therapy?”

“No,” Regina said as she started eating her salad.

“It’s where people with disorders like, say, ADHD, anxiety, autism, depression, PTSD for example, spend time with the horses either riding them or grooming them and it helps them because they can create a bond with the animals. The stables we’re going to is running a session tonight with kids under nine who have quite serious autism or Asperger’s and struggle with social interaction. So it’s better for them to come at night when the stables is closed and it’s all nice and quiet. They won’t be riding, obviously because it’s dark, just spending time with the horses in their little bedrooms...”

“Pen,” Regina corrected softly.

“Spending time with the horses in their pens,” Emma amended, “and grooming them and stuff. We’re there because we want to consider introducing it at the stables you own so we’re volunteering to help out for the evening.”

Silence filled the bug and Emma began to worry that it was all a stupid idea and that she should turn the car around and go to La Mer. What was she thinking, taking a former Queen to a stables at night to muck out poo with children she’d never met?

“That... that sounds wonderful,” Regina admitted in surprise, never would she have considered that her first date with Emma would be anything like this. She’d thought of a few different scenarios but one so perfectly suited to her interests never even crossed her mind and she found herself actually getting excited about the prospect.

“Are you sure?” Emma checked, “I mean, we don’t have to do this, we can turn around and...”

“It’s perfect,” Regina smiled brightly as she tucked into her salad happily and seemed to visibly relax into the worn chair.

Emma smiled smugly, it had been a gamble but luckily it had paid off and she had never been more pleased that she had taken dating advice from an eleven year old.

Chapter 31

Emma considered that crossing the town line must have had an effect on Regina because the grumpy, sassy former Mayor was nowhere to be seen at the Wellgrove Stables. Regina introduced herself and Emma to the stable owner, a Melissa Wellgrove, and immediately launched into a detailed discussion about the horses, the stables and the therapy.

Regina had never seemed so completely at ease and thoroughly captivated before and it was all Emma could do not to stare at the animated woman as she spoke to Melissa. A quick tour of the facilities and the first of the children started to arrive, a number of helpers where on hand and the children were split into groups and taken to different pens to interact with different horses.

Somehow Emma got separated from Regina but she didn't mind as she knew Regina was absolutely in her element. Emma brushed a tall black horse called Squire with a little girl called Clara who told Emma that she had ridden Squire the previous week and he was her favourite. Emma had to admit she hadn't realised how special the time the kids spent with the horses would be, she watched as Clara blossomed from someone who was so nervous she refused to make eye contact to a chatty and confident little girl.

When it came to cleaning Squire's feet Emma decided it was best to get out of the way and leave Clara with the more experienced helpers and left the pen in search of Regina. She walked down the dimly lit stables and peeked into various pens to see children all having fun and interacting with different horses.

She turned a corner and saw a sight that made her heart melt, on a small wooden bench Regina sat with a little boy no older than six on her lap and buried into an embrace. Regina hadn't noticed Emma's approach and continued to talk softly to the boy and as she got closer Emma made out some of the words being said.

“They are very big so it’s only natural to be scared but horses are very gentle creatures,” she whispered, “would you like to stand outside the pen and watch me brush Pebbles?”

The little boy nodded his head a little and Regina smiled happily and looked around for another adult and her eyes landed on Emma who was slowly walking towards them, “ah, Benjamin, this is Emma, she’s my friend so maybe you and her can stand outside the pen together?”

Benjamin regarded Emma curiously for a few moments but didn’t seem interested in moving from Regina’s lap, not that Emma could blame him. Emma realised she needed to step up or Regina would be sat there all night so she bent down to be at eye level with the boy and smiled warmly at him.

“Are you a little unsure of the horses?” Emma asked gently.

Benjamin nodded a few times and looked at Emma with interest so she continued, “why don’t we watch Regina brushing a horse and then if we feel brave later then maybe we can help?”

Benjamin regarded Emma for a while and then nodded and let go of Regina and hopped down onto the floor and took Emma’s hand. Regina and Emma’s eyes met briefly before Regina guided them both to a pen at the end of the stables where a beautiful light brown mare was looking at the three of them with interest.

Benjamin stood back a little in trepidation and Regina dragged another small bench to the side of the stall and looked at him “if you stand here then you can see and Emma can stand with you.”

Regina quickly opened the door and entered the pen and petted Pebbles who was looking at her with wide excited eyes and Regina produced a brush and allowed Pebbles some time to get used to her before she gently started to brush her long mane.

Benjamin stretched to see what was happening and eventually gave in and stood on the bench and leaned over the side of the pen to watch what was happening. Pebbles glanced up at him but Regina kept her distracted and

constantly spoke about what she was doing and pointing out what Pebbles liked to Benjamin.

Emma stood beside him and watched Regina silently praising herself for listening to Henry and not Ruby. Being sat at La Mer making awkward small talk while waiting for an overpriced piece of sea bass to be served was not her idea of fun.

Melissa came up beside Emma and smiled as she looked at Benjamin with interest, she leaned in and whispered to Emma, “I’m impressed, Benjamin has been here four times but this is the closest he has gotten to the horses. He normally prefers to watch from the entrance.”

Emma smiled with pride that Regina had been the one to coax Benjamin out of his shell, she whispered back, “where’s his parents?”

“They drop him off, he hates being the centre of attention,” Melissa explained quietly, “he prefers they drop him off and pick him up at the end. His mother rides here a lot so I know the family quite well...”

Melissa drifted off as she stared at the stall with a wide grin on her face, Emma turned to see Benjamin leaning forward with his hand out and touching the top of Pebbles’ head, Regina stood between the two of them.

It was as close as Benjamin was prepared to get to horses that evening but it was closer than anyone expected him to get. Shortly after that he ran into the stables office and phoned his mom on her mobile and excitedly told her how he had petted a horses’ head for at least a minute.

Regina had curled her finger for Emma to join her in the pen with Pebbles and stood behind Emma as she reached around the blonde and placed the brush in Emma’s hand and then covered it with her own. They silently brushed Pebbles for a while, Regina loving the feel of being close to someone in an intimate though innocent way.

“Thank you,” Regina whispered into softly curled blonde locks.

“For what?” Emma asked, her voice huskier than she remembered it ever being.

“For bringing me here,” Regina replied as she placed a gentle kiss on Emma’s cheek and took a step back, “I’m going to go and help the others.”

She smiled at Emma’s dumbstruck face as she walked away and left Emma standing there holding the brush and wondering if she’d ever wash her cheek again. Suddenly Pebbles turned around and gently nudged her with her head and Emma blinked and turned to the mare.

“Okay, okay I’ll brush you,” Emma smiled and lifted up the brush.

But Pebbles nudged Emma’s hand away and started to turn in the stall until she was in a position where she could gently push Emma towards the exit, “oh,” Emma laughed in understanding, “you want me to go after her, got it,” she said as she opened the stall gate and looked back at Pebbles, “you’re my favourite.”

Later on as they drove back over the town line and into Storybrooke Emma wondered again if she’d picked up the wrong woman. Regina had chatted nonstop on the way back, excitedly telling Emma of her plans to set up a similar session in Storybrooke and how she would speak to Mary Margaret about it the very next day. She was animated as she recounted stories of the children and the horses and that Melissa had offered for her to come back at any time and help out.

Emma had brought snacks for the way back, just in case they were peckish and her eyes kept flicking from the road to Regina as she watched the brunette demolish an enormous chocolate chip muffin. At one point Regina started to talk about when she was a little girl and had first been allowed near horses and the calm they had brought her. Emma didn’t push the subject and just listened, giving Regina the opportunity to divulge only as much as she was comfortable with.

As they pulled onto the driveway at Mifflin Street Regina suddenly blushed, “I’m so sorry I’ve just talked at you nonstop for the last hour, how rude of me!”

“Not at all,” Emma beamed happily, “I’m just so glad you enjoyed it, I really agonised over what to do on our first date and I’m sorry it wasn’t very date-y but...”

“It was marvellous,” Regina smiled in a way that Emma thought could fix all problems, right all wrongs and she smiled back.

“I’ll walk you to the door,” Emma said and then mumbled, “and collect my mother...”

Regina chuckled, “I suspect you’ll be pumped for information tonight.”

“Yep, she won’t get any though,” Emma laughed as Regina got her house keys from her bag and unlocked the front door. Regina took off her coat and walked towards the living room where Mary Margaret was reading a romantic novel with a tissue in her hand.

“Oh! You’re back!”

Emma caught up to Regina and looked into the living room and laughed at the soppy scene in front of her that was causing Regina to shake her head in despair as she muttered, “so this is what it’s come to.”

Mary Margaret placed the tissue up the sleeve of her cardigan and closed the well-read book and placed it in her bag, “Henry’s been an angel,” she told Regina as she stood up and walked into the hallway.

“Of course he has,” Regina said obviously.

Mary Margaret just smiled as she walked towards the front door and got her coat from the closet. Emma and Regina stood facing each other and both realising they didn’t want the evening to be over but neither knowing what to say or how to end it.

Mary Margaret adjusted her scarf and slung her bag over her shoulder and looked at the pair with a shake of the head as they silently smiled at one another.

“Oh, for God’s sake, just kiss!” Mary Margaret called up to them before opening the door and leaving to wait in the bug for Emma.

Regina looked shocked and Emma rolled her eyes, “she’s not the mother I expected.”

“She’s not the daughter I raised,” Regina shrugged.

“I had a great time,” Emma said honestly.

“So did I,” Regina admitted.

“I’d really like to go out again with you,” Emma said softly as she inched slightly closer.

“I... I’d like that,” Regina admitted with a small nod.

“May I kiss you?” Emma asked as her lips were centimetres away.

“Please,” Regina whispered.

Emma closed the gap and placed her slightly parted lips over Regina’s and applied a small amount of pressure. She wasn’t sure if she had moaned in pleasure or Regina but she soon felt Regina returning the kiss, softly and hesitantly but definitely returning the kiss.

Regina softly pulled away, “tomorrow,” she whispered.

“Tomorrow?” Emma asked.

“Can I see you tomorrow?” Regina asked with an embarrassed blush creeping over her cheeks.

“I’m working the night shift,” Emma shook her head sadly, “the next day?”

“Henry’s football match,” Regina supplied, “and your meeting,” she reminded the blonde.

“Damn, yes, erm, Thursday?” Emma asked with a hint of desperation seeping into her voice. Never had Thursday seemed so far away from Monday before.

Regina nodded, “Thursday, we’ll speak later and arrange times etcetera.”

Emma smiled and placed a quick kiss on Regina’s lips before hurrying down the hall, “I better go before she comes back,” she said of her mother and opened the front door and looked up at Regina with a huge smile one last time.

“Thursday,” she said in a promise, “I had a great time.”

“So did I,” Regina told her again, “Thursday,” she nodded.

“And I’ll speak to you tomorrow,” Emma added as she smiled again and closed the door. As she walked towards the car she fist pumped happily completely forgetting the hall window that led Regina to witness it with a smile and a shake of the head.

Chapter 32

Emma tried to contain her smile as she got into the bug beside Mary Margaret who was staring at her and clearly waiting for her to speak. Emma silently started the car and reversed it out of the drive without even looking at her mother who looked like she was going to burst.

Once Emma put the car into drive she started counting and only got to six before Mary Margaret spoke, “well?!”

“Yeah, it was great, thanks,” Emma said with a pleasant smile.

“Oh no, no, you’re giving me more than that,” Mary Margaret folded her arms grumpily, “I did not just learn how to play LEGO Star Wars for no reason, falling down those holes and losing all my studs is really depressing, so spill!”

“I don’t kiss and tell,” Emma mumbled quietly.

“So, you did kiss,” Mary Margaret clapped her hands with excitement, “oh, Emma, this is wonderful, I’ve been thinking about it and you and Regina being a couple really is great for everyone.”

Emma slammed her foot on the brake and the car skidded to a halt in the deserted road.

“What did I say?” Mary Margaret frowned.

“I don’t get it,” Emma turned to her, “why are you so... okay with this?”

“I’m Snow White?” Mary Margaret shrugged but at Emma’s continued glare she sighed, “okay, fine,” she mumbled, “it was the other night at dinner... it was so nice having Regina back in the family again, back in my family. Everyone forgets that she raised me from when I was ten, she wasn’t always the Evil Queen, Rumpelstiltskin and, in some ways, my father turned her into that. She hated me for what I did, blamed me for the death of her true

love but she still played with me, helped me braid my hair, let me sleep in her bed when I had nightmares, tended to my grazed knees. She was the best step-mother I could have ever hoped for and, despite her becoming darker, she never hurt me and we became close. I think that's why she could never kill me because God only knows she had the opportunity to do it so many times. I honestly always believed that Regina was a good person, that she had been manipulated and moulded into whatever Rumpelstiltskin wanted of her.”

Mary Margaret smiled sadly, “I think I always wanted her back in my life, even when she killed my father and I was living in the forest and living life as a bandit with her guards chasing me... there was still a part of me that just wanted to walk right into the castle, walk right up to her and try and make things right. But by then she was so consumed with anger I knew she wouldn't listen. Her mind was twisted, she wasn't the Regina I knew... the Regina I knew and loved. But at dinner, I saw her again, just little glimpses and I remembered, oh Emma, I remembered those good times.”

Mary Margaret got the tissue out from her sleeve and dabbed at her tears that were started to fall, “I know that she will remember those times differently, I know that she was in so much pain and she felt trapped and unloved. But as a child I had no idea, all I knew was that I felt loved, I was safe, happy and loved. And nothing that Regina did after that can change those deep-rooted feelings that she left within me. And I know that she has an enormous capacity for love, if she can make you feel as safe, happy and loved as she made me feel then I'll support you both to the end of time.”

Emma sniffed as she suddenly realised that she too was starting to cry following her mother's heartfelt speech, “wow, you are Snow White,” Emma jested as her mother handed her a clean tissue from her bag.

“I know,” Mary Margaret nodded in agreement, “I make myself sick sometimes,” she joked, “seriously though Emma, I hope it works out for the two of you because I can see you'd both make each other very happy.”

Emma finished drying her tears before she asked the question she had been almost too afraid to ask, “and... what about David?”

Mary Margaret took a deep breath and laughed, “well, David has never really understood the relationship between Regina and I and when I told him that you two were going on a date... well... it took a while for it to sink in. But he’ll be happy as long as you are happy, it might take him a while to understand it all but he will.”

Emma nodded, “good, because I just had the best date... ever,” a smile built up over her face, “and I have another date on Thursday.”

Mary Margaret squealed as she clapped her hands together excitedly, “let’s go home and you can tell me all about it, I’m actually very interested to hear about this equine therapy.”

Emma put the car back into gear, “well, on that note, I think you may well have a visit from Regina about that very soon!”

Chapter 33

As soon as the front door closed at 108 Mifflin Street Regina watched the fist-pumping Sheriff walk towards the driveway with a fond shake of her head before looking up and right into the eyes of her son. Henry had been peeking through the bannister rails and watching his mother's return from their date, Regina knew that Henry thought he was hidden in the shadows up there.

As Regina's eyes met his he suddenly realised that his brilliant hiding place was in fact terrible and he gave her a small wave.

"Henry, what are you doing up?" Regina folded her arms and looked at him in annoyance.

"I wanted to see how the date went," Henry whispered just loud enough for Regina to hear.

"Well, now you know," she said finally, "off to bed."

"But Mom," Henry started to descend the stairs, "I don't know anything, did you like the horses?"

Regina regarded him as he came down the stairs in his too-short sleepwear and sighed, "one quick mug of hot chocolate and then it's bed, for both of us," she told him as she walked into the kitchen and filled the kettle up. Henry followed her into the kitchen and quickly grabbed two mugs from the cupboard and got out the hot chocolate mix and started to measure out a spoonful for each mug.

"So, did you like the horses?" Henry asked again, "Emma said they are like assistance dogs... but horses."

Regina smiled, "I liked the horses very much and Emma's right, the horses are therapeutic for children who find it difficult to cope with day to day life."

“So, it was a good date?” Henry grinned as they both waited for the kettle to boil.

“Yes,” Regina ruffled his hair, “it was a good date. Did you have to talk Emma out of La Mer?”

“Yeah, she asked Ruby’s advice,” Henry rolled his eyes and shook his head.

“Ruby?” Regina cringed, “then I’m very glad you intervened.”

“Yeah, Emma was really nervous,” Henry revealed.

“Oh yes?” Regina asked casually.

“Yeah, but no more nervous than you,” Henry added, “but she was asking Ruby for advice, she wanted to make sure you had the best date ever.”

“Well, she certainly succeeded,” Regina smiled.

“So, where are you going to take her on Thursday?” Henry asked.

Regina paused as she considered the matter, “me?”

“Yeah, you,” Henry smiled, “you asked, you said you wanted to date her again and she organised the last one. It’s totally your turn, Mom.”

Regina looked at the kettle in surprise and watched as the steam started to appear from the top, she hadn’t considered that at all. She had just assumed that Emma, being the more experienced and the more knowledgeable of the whole dating thing, would continue to plan their dates. But then Regina knew that was unfair to the blonde and also played to her own disadvantage, it showed her weakness in the understanding of the social structures of this world.

“You’re right, Henry,” Regina nodded as the kettle finished boiling and she began to pour water into the two cups as Henry got some milk from the fridge, “it is my turn to organise the date.”

She was lost in thought as Henry carefully poured milk into the two cups until he spoke up, “would you like some advice?”

Regina regarded him with interest, Henry had a way of knowing everything about everything he was like the town gossip without even trying. He was also the person closest to Emma and the one she’d most likely to confide in, if anyone was going to be able to help her organise a date for the blonde, it was Henry.

“Yes, I suppose I would,” Regina admitted.

“Come into my office,” Henry said as he picked up his mug and sat at the kitchen bench and waited for Regina to sit beside him.

“Emma has simple tastes,” Henry began.

“It shows,” Regina mumbled.

“Hey, be nice or I won’t help,” Henry chided and nodded when Regina mouthed a silent apology, “Emma has simple tastes, she won’t want to go to a posh restaurant but she does like food. So you better involve food in whatever you decide to do.”

Regina silenced her approaching comment by taking a sip of hot chocolate and allowing Henry to continue, “she kinda feels like people all want something from her in Storybrooke, everyone thinks that she is the Saviour and they all kinda want a piece of her, you know? She doesn’t like that. She sometimes goes for long drives in her car to get away from people, oh, and she loves her car, like probably more than me so don’t diss it.”

Regina laughed, “she couldn’t possibly love that car more than you,” she reassured him.

Henry shrugged, “it’s a close call,” he guessed before squinting as he thought on, “she always complains that Storybrooke hasn’t got stuff, like a gym or a swimming pool. She loves swimming but she only learnt a couple of years ago because she didn’t get a chance to learn when she was growing up.

All her foster families were horrible, she doesn't like talking about them, it makes her cry.”

Regina felt a wave of guilt wash over her at that but silently nodded as she asked, “all that's quite negative, what does she like, Henry?”

“Fun,” Henry laughed a little, “she's really goofy and funny, she likes adventures, that's why she's the Saviour.

Suddenly Regina remembered something she had seen at Wellgrove Stables and grinned, “you know, Henry, I think I know just the right thing.”

Chapter 34

Emma listened to the digital female voice asking her if she'd like to leave a message and frowned as she hung up the telephone. She'd called Regina twice now, once two hours ago and once two seconds ago and neither time did the brunette answer. Emma had held out on calling Regina until the afternoon in the hope that Regina would cave and call her first but it hadn't happened and the boring day in the Sheriff's office had prompted Emma into acting first.

“Stupid, stupid,” Emma muttered to herself as she realised that Regina would now have two missed calls from her which would start to look a little like desperation. Although she hadn't left a message either time so she was still hoping she could get away with seeming casual.

Emma sighed as her brain started analysing the lack of contact and she suddenly recalled vividly why she hated dating and all the mind games that seemed to go with it. She wondered if Regina was having second thoughts, if she shouldn't have pushed that kiss last night. Maybe Regina had decided she was straight as an arrow and there was no point in trying to convince herself otherwise.

She was pretty sure Regina had enjoyed the date but then maybe she was just trying to be nice, as unlikely as that seemed. She knew she shouldn't have given Regina dinner in a takeout bag but that was the only way they'd make it to the stables in time. She put her head on the desk and let out a long, low moan of anguish.

“Hey, Emma,” Henry said as he walked into her office with a smile and dropped his backpack on the floor, ignoring the state of his birth mother.

Emma quickly looked up and smiled, “Henry! Henry! My wonderful, brilliant son!”

“Information is probably going to cost you a cheeseburger,” Henry said with a sneaky smile.

With a moment of hesitation Emma looked at her watch and knew that a cheeseburger now would ruin Henry's dinner and she hadn't cleared it with Regina. Henry could see the silent debate that Emma was having and reached into his pocket and took out a piece of paper and handed it to her, "I offer generous credit terms," he told her seriously.

She unfolded the paper and looked at an IOU note addressed to Henry from her for the amount of two cheeseburgers.

"This says two cheeseburgers," Emma pointed out.

"I can either have one cheeseburger now or two cheeseburgers at a later date," Henry shrugged, "or I can go home and do my homework."

Henry started to stand up and Emma launched herself across the desk and grabbed his arm to encourage him to sit down, "okay, okay, I'll give you two cheeseburgers, but not today because your mom will kill me if I let you ruin your appetite... by the way I have called her but I can't get through?"

"She's riding today," Henry explained casually, "her phone will be in the office."

"Oh," Emma sat back in her chair with relief, "that makes sense," she nodded, "so, what did she say?"

Henry looked at her quietly and then gestured the piece of paper on her desk.

"You seriously want me to sign this?" Emma sighed and shook her head as she picked up a pen and signed the IOU and handed it back to him. Henry looked at it for a moment as if to confirm the signature was real and then nodded as he tucked it back into his pocket.

"She really liked the date," Henry supplied, "she said you succeeded in taking her on the best date ever."

Emma beamed happily and let out a sigh of relief, the silent treatment had really begun to wear on her and she had convinced herself that she was the

only one who'd enjoyed the previous evening.

“And she’s going to organise the next date,” Henry told her.

“She is?” Emma gulped, she wasn’t expecting that, in fact she was expecting to bribe Henry with sweets about a suggestion on what to do next, “what’s she planning?”

“I can’t say,” Henry told her.

“Can’t or won’t?” Emma asked.

“Won’t,” Henry grinned, enjoying Emma’s squirming.

“Oh, come on Henry, give me a clue, please, anything,” Emma begged.

“Nope,” Henry shook his head, “I promised Mom, besides I didn’t tell her anything about what you planned.”

Emma was about to continue her questioning when her phone lit up and started to vibrate across the desk, she looked at Henry and he smiled as he realised it was Regina on the phone.

“Better answer it,” Henry smiled.

With an incredulous shake of her head at exactly how much Henry is enjoying this she answered the phone, “hey, Regina.”

“Hello, dear,” Regina replied, “sorry I missed your calls, I was out riding.”

“That’s fine,” Emma smiled happily and attempted to ignore Henry who was using both hands to mimic a conversation, one hand chatting and then the other laughing.

“I actually was going to call you when I got back anyway,” Regina said, “I wanted to tell you that I am planning Thursday.”

“Oh,” Emma tried to sound surprised and rolled her eyes as Henry’s hand gestures appeared to be making out, “what’s the plan?”

“It’s a surprise,” Regina told her, “what time do you finish work on Thursday?”

“Five,” Emma said as she lightly slapped Henry’s hands and walked away from him.

“Wonderful, I’ll pick you up from the station, it will be a dine and dash I’m afraid, I’ll bring something from Granny’s,” Regina said.

“Oh, what about clothes?” Emma asked in confusion.

“By all means wear some,” Regina added flippantly.

“Ha ha,” Emma rolled her eyes.

“Your work clothes will be fine, we’re not going anywhere fancy,” Regina told her.

“I... I really enjoyed last night,” Emma said quietly so Henry didn’t hear.

“Me too,” Regina breathed, “are you sure you can’t come round tonight? I’ll cook you a proper meal.”

“I can’t,” Emma said sadly, “I have too much to do for the meeting tomorrow.”

“I understand,” Regina replied, not wanting to make Emma feel bad, “Thursday it is.”

“Yes, where are we going again?” Emma tried.

“Nice try,” Regina laughed, “goodbye, Emma.”

Emma smiled, “bye, Regina...”

She hung up the phone and smiled goofily at it for a few moments.

“Bye, Regina,” Henry breathed dramatically before faking a swooning fit that had him lying on the floor.

“That’s it,” Emma declared, “I’m actually going to kill you,” she joked and he jumped to his feet and tore through the office with Emma hot on his heels.

Chapter 35

Regina sat in her traditional front row seat on the hard metal benches at the soccer field, her thick winter coat wrapped around her and her gloved hands hugging a thermos flask of coffee.

As usual she had arrived early and sat indifferently as the other seats began to fill up, of course her fellow spectators ignored her and attempted to sit as far away as possible from her. She could hear vague mutterings as per usual but rather than ignoring them with a sigh like she would normally do, this time she found herself listening out for what was being said.

The leather cuff that held her magic at bay may have been invisible under many layers of clothing as far as everyone else was concerned but Regina felt as though it was on display. A chill at the thought caused her to shiver as she clutched at the thermos flask tighter knowing that she was effectively surrounded by enemies and completely powerless if they chose to act.

Part of her wanted to get up and leave but the stronger part of her wanted to watch Henry play his match, such was her stubborn nature. The fear that was bubbling up inside of her would never be as strong as her desire to show her strength and feign that no one would stop her from doing as she pleased. That particular trait had gotten her into trouble in the past and she knew that she would rather end up in a potentially dangerous situation rather than show any form of weakness.

But that didn't stop the fear bubbling up inside her and it especially wasn't helped by the splitting headache that had been growing in intensity all day. Nightmares the previous evening had prevented her from getting anywhere near the amount of sleep needed to function and the headache had throbbed preventing her from napping during the day.

Suddenly she felt a presence behind her and jumped to her feet and turned around to face the person and breathed a sigh of relief when she saw David standing with his hands up and a smile on his face.

“Hey,” he grinned, “sorry, didn’t mean to spook you.”

Regina flushed with embarrassment and quickly took her seat again to stop from having to see the gathering crowd looking at her.

David took the seat next to her and placed the thermos flask he had been holding in between his feet.

“So,” David took a breath, “you and Emma...”

Regina visibly deflated as she let out a sigh and shook her head at whatever was due to fall from the man’s mouth next.

“Erm,” he said as he looked nervously around the field which was beginning to fill with children warming up and practicing.

“Erm?” Regina looked at him in surprise, “erm? Is that all you have to say to me?”

David scratched the back of his head as he looked uncomfortably anywhere but at Regina, “well, I... well...”

Regina turned slightly to regard him as she indignantly mimicked him, “well, I... well? Erm?”

“I’m sorry, it’s not something I ever saw coming!” David defended his incoherent mumblings.

“Well it’s not like I had it in my diary either,” Regina grumbled, “it just kind of happened. And it’s going to continue happening whether you like it or not.”

Regina looked away and feigned interest of what was happening on the pitch and David looked at her with a small smile, “I was going to wish you well,” he laughed softly.

Regina looked at him in confusion and opened her mouth but found no words were forthcoming.

“I’ll be honest, you’re not my first choice in a partner for my daughter,” David continued as he bent down and picked up his thermos and began to unscrew the lid, “we’ve been at war for many years and it’s taken a long time to get to...” he laughed, “whatever the hell it is we’re at now. Truce? Peace? Whatever.”

Regina looked at him with interest as he poured hot coffee into the cup and listened to him continue, “so when Snow first told me I’ll admit I was surprised, even angry at first but then I realised that was borne out of fear. I didn’t want you to hurt my daughter,” he admitted as he took a sip of coffee.

“I would never intentionally hurt Emma,” Regina whispered softly as she attempted to fight away the images of the blonde being hurtled across her hallway by her own hand.

David nodded, “yeah, I began to realise that, I lay awake all night thinking about it. Trying to figure out why on earth you two were together, wondering what kind of plot it was. And then my anger and my fear started to fade and I started to think rationally, to really think about Emma and the kind of woman she is and the kind of partner she’d want. Not the kind of partner I’d want for her but who she would want.”

Regina sat quietly and listened, desperate to know what David had to say even though she didn’t want to admit that she wanted his acceptance. Trying to convince herself that the only reason David’s blessing meant anything to her was for Emma’s sake.

“She needs someone who can understand her, someone strong enough to fight for her. And, though it pains me to admit it,” he smiled at Regina’s eye roll, “you fit those categories.”

The teams gathered on the pitch and David and Regina mindlessly applauded with the rest of the crowd and a whistle sounded to indicate the opening on the match.

After a few moments Regina spoke again, “so, you’re in favour of... our seeing each other?”

“In favour is a bit strong,” David smiled, “I’m accepting of it, I’m not quite at the point of being in favour yet. It’s still early days.”

“Yes, it is,” Regina agreed as she held a hand up to her forehead to massage away some of the pain in her temple.

“Just... treat her well,” David said hesitantly, not wanting to offend the former Queen.

“Or you’ll threaten me with your sword?” Regina questioned with a smirk.

“No,” David laughed, “I’ll buy Henry a drum kit for Christmas.”

They shared a small laugh, the tension of the situation was being slowly diffused. A goal was scored and parents began applauding and whooping happily.

“I promise I’ll treat her well,” Regina said quietly and David bowed his head in appreciation of the fact.

Chapter 36

At exactly five o'clock on Thursday Emma nervously exited the Sheriff's office to see Regina's black Mercedes pull up outside. She quickly hurried over to the car and opened the passenger door and poked her head in, "hey," she smiled as she got in and closed the door behind her.

Regina smiled as she waited for Emma to put her seatbelt on and then produced a takeout bag from the backseat of the car, "some unidentifiable meat sopping in grease and wrapped in a stale bun," she joked as she handed the bag to Emma.

"My favourite," Emma laughed as she opened the bag and looked at the burger, fries and milkshake inside, "what are you having?"

"I've eaten," Regina replied as she put the car into drive and pulled into the road.

"So," Emma said as she started to pick at the fries, "where are we going?"

"I told you, it's a surprise," Regina said with a grin.

"I told you your surprise once we were in the car," Emma grumbled.

"Only because I made it clear that I don't like surprises, you on the other hand seem to find them enjoyable," Regina laughed, "although I'm sure Henry told you already."

"No, that little weasel won't say a word," Emma sighed.

"Weasel?" Regina laughed, "that's our son you're talking about."

Emma smiled at the reference to their son but didn't say anything, "he is being a pain in the ass lately, he keeps mocking me about our date and he won't tell me anything."

“Oh, he’s very similar with me,” Regina nodded, “but I’m glad he hasn’t spoilt your surprise but I’m disappointed that you attempted to extract information from him.”

Emma swallowed a bite of her burger, “oh come on, like you didn’t try exactly the same thing!”

“Maybe,” Regina allowed as she reached into her inner jacket pocket and produced a piece of paper, “although I thought the Sheriff’s department was above corruption.”

Emma took the paper from Regina’s hand and noted that it was the IOU that Henry had made her sign two days ago, “how did you get this?”

“As good as Henry is at bribing law officials, he’s somewhat lacking when it comes to emptying his pockets when putting clothing in to be washed,” Regina explained, “really Emma, two cheeseburgers, what did that get you?”

Emma grinned, “confirmation that you thought it was the best date ever.”

“I would have told you that,” Regina remarked, “for free.”

Emma laughed, “to be honest,” she considered, “I didn’t really get my money’s worth for that IOU.”

“Then you should be thanking me for retrieving it for you,” Regina purred.

Emma licked her lips as she smiled at the tone, “how would you like me to thank you, Regina?”

An adorable blush coloured Regina’s cheeks and she shifted a little in her seat with embarrassment that caused Emma to smile. Emma still didn’t know Regina’s feelings on the more intimate, physical side of their burgeoning relationship but got the distinct impression that Regina wasn’t the touchy feely type and that anything more would not happen in the immediate future.

She decided to lighten the mood and let the brunette off of the hook, “oh, we’re heading out of town again?”

The orange spray-painted line appeared up ahead and Regina nodded, “yes, as long as that’s okay?”

“Sure, I like to get out of Storybrooke now and then,” Emma admitted and then looked at Regina, “not that it’s not been excellently designed,” she joked.

Regina gave a small smile and Emma’s face fell, “curse talk not good on a date?”

“Oh, it’s fine,” Regina replied distractedly, “I did the deed, I deserve the comments.”

“What’s wrong?” Emma pushed.

“Nothing, I’m fine,” Regina said with an attempt at a neutral face.

“Regina,” Emma tried again.

Regina let out a sigh, “it’s nothing, just a small headache, I don’t want it to ruin the mood.”

Emma regarded her for a moment and then returned to her meal, “okay,” she said, “just don’t try to keep things from me. I’d rather know.”

“There’s nothing to know,” Regina claimed.

“I’d rather know,” Emma repeated firmly.

Regina nodded but silently raised an eyebrow, surprised at the severe tone.

“I’m sorry,” Emma sighed, “I just have this thing where I have to know what’s going on.”

“Family trait,” Regina nodded, “it’s called being nosy.”

Emma smiled despite the obvious barb directed at her mother, ignoring it because of its truth, “no, it’s from when I was a kid,” she said and then

drifted off as she looked out of the window and watched the scenery speed by.

After a moment Regina prompted her to continue, “how so?”

Emma took a breath as she turned back to Regina, “there were a lot of times when I was a kid where I didn’t know what was going to happen to me. I was dumped in a new home, pulled out of a family, left in a group home. I always seemed the last to know everything. I remember playing with my toys in my room in one of my foster homes, when I was really young, and I had no idea anything was up. Then I looked up and there they were, the whole family and these people I didn’t recognise. Suddenly I was picked up and put in this car with the people I’d never seen before and that was that.”

“That’s terrible,” Regina said in outrage.

Emma shrugged, “it’s how things were back then, the system has improved a lot. But my point is that I gradually got angry at being left out of the loop, after a while I kinda expected to be moved about but it was the not knowing that hurt the most. If I knew that on Tuesday at eleven some jerks in suits would take me to a new group home then fine. But it was the secrecy.”

“I understand,” Regina nodded as she gripped the wheel tightly, “you want all the information so you can be in control of your own destiny and aware of what is happening, or might be happening, around you.”

“Exactly,” Emma stared at Regina in surprise. The few times when she had explained the compulsion to know everything to other people they had never fully understood and the more she explained it the more they would shrug it off. It seemed that lots of people Emma met in her life thought she should just learn to deal with the rough start she’d had in life, to move on. But no matter how many times she tried to bury or deal with the emotions she found she was never very successful at either.

“In that case I will bore you with constant updates,” Regina told her with an evil grin, “soon you’ll be so overwhelmed with boring information about my daily life you’ll beg me to be silent.”

Emma smiled at Regina's gently diffusing of the situation and took another bite of her burger.

"I presume Henry told you that he scored a goal last night?" Regina asked softly.

"Only three times and I've not even seen him," Emma laughed.

"It was really very impressive, that stupid Duncan boy was just standing around being useless as he often does and then the opposing team's central defender tripped and the ball bounced off of Duncan and right into Henry's path," Regina explained, "well, there was no one around so Henry just decided to run towards the goal and he dodged that large oaf from Mister Wyatt's class, the one that must have been held back two years to be that tall, and then he just went for it, beautiful sliding kick and the goalie didn't have a chance."

Emma tried to keep herself from laughing at the animated pride with which Regina delivered the match report, "so I heard," she said.

"I was so proud," Regina said, "and surprised, I nearly hugged your father!"

"David was there?" Emma asked, "he didn't mention it."

"I don't think he knows what's going on half the time, he still thinks it's called baseball," Regina rolled her eyes.

"Was he... okay?" Emma asked casually.

"Of course, why wouldn't he be?" Regina asked with a small smirk.

"No reason," Emma said casually, "just asking... oh wow!"

Regina looked over at Emma's excited face and casually asked, "is everything all right, dear?"

Emma had completely forgotten about the remains of her dinner as she looked out of the window with all the glee of a child on Christmas morning.

“What is that?” Regina asked innocently as she frowned at the flashing lights and loud noise.

“It’s a fun fair,” Emma told Regina excitedly, “I always wanted to go, never did, obviously, but every time I see one I get so excited. The stalls, the games, the rides, the food it’s like heaven for children.”

“Hmm,” Regina said with a smile as she realised that Emma had yet to figure out that this was where they were stopping. Emma was too busy craning her neck to look at the garish flashing lights of a ride that spun around at a dizzying rate to notice that Regina was pulling into the car park beside the fair.

Emma only noticed that they’d come to a stop when Regina turned the car engine off and Emma spun around with confusion and suddenly realised they were parked up in the fun fair carpark. She stared at Regina in shock, “are... are you kidding? You’re... we’re going to the fair?”

Emma’s face held a heart-breaking mix of excitement and fear, fear that the other shoe was about to drop and that it would all be revealed to be a joke.

“We’re going to the fair,” Regina confirmed, “when we were at the stables I saw a poster and I thought this might be something you’d like.”

Emma suddenly didn’t care about how touchy feely Regina was as she grabbed the brunette by the coat and pulled her forward so they met at the centre console and she wrapped her arms around Regina tightly, “oh my God, thank you, thank you so much!”

Regina was surprised by Emma’s sudden regression to childhood and grinned happily as she warned, “now, remember, I have no idea what to expect in there so I’ll need you to guide me through everything.”

“Oh, you’ll love it!” Emma said as she let go of Regina and turned around to regard the flashing lights again, “there’s a ghost train and a fun house and... you can win a minion! I’m going to win you a minion!”

“What’s a minion?” Regina asked as Emma started to get out of the car.

Chapter 37

Any doubts Regina had originally held completely evaporated at the sight of Emma smiling so brightly she could continue to light the fun fair single-handedly should there be a sudden power outage. From the moment they had entered the fair Emma had begun excitedly pointing out things she wanted to see and do with bright eyes and a smile that never seemed to end.

The enthusiasm was clearly catching as Regina found her headache disappearing and her own excitement building. She smiled as much as Emma but it wasn't at the sights and sounds of the fair but more at the knowledge that she was the cause of the blonde's own smile.

As soon as they entered the fair Emma had made a beeline for a food stall and purchased a toffee apple covered in white chocolate and sprinkles and suggested that they share the treat. Regina had joked about having no idea how to even crack into the beast and had to admit she found it strangely sensual as Emma took the first bite in order to provide a means for Regina to daintily nibble the edge of the treat.

Originally the plan had been to stroll around the fair and to take in all the sights and then decide what to do but that had immediately fallen apart due to Emma's excitable need to do everything instantaneously. Regina had the toffee apple on a stick thrust into her hand as Emma rushed towards one of the many games stalls and handed over some money in exchange for some brightly coloured plastic balls.

The game, like so many of them, appeared to pay-out in paper tickets to be accumulated and then exchanged for something in a shop by the exit. Emma had pocketed the tickets and then dragged Regina to another stall which involved fishing items out of a pond with magnets. Regina absentmindedly nibbled on the toffee apple and in between games Emma took large bites and before long it was gone.

Regina had barely swallowed the last bite when Emma looked at her pleadingly in a way Henry often did and asked if she would consider going

on a ride with her. With a fearful expression Regina looked up at a large pendulum style ride which seemed to spin riders around on the end of a very long mechanical arm but before she could speak Emma grabbed her arms and stood in front of her, face to face. She said they'd build up to the bigger rides and asked if Regina trusted her.

Regina immediately replied that she did and Emma took her by the hand and dragged her towards a ride, before Regina could even see what she was signing up for she was sat in a cramped, colourful bucket-shaped device with a steering wheel. Emma took a seat in her own cart next to her and Regina looked at her in confusion and Emma smiled brightly as she explained it was a car, one pedal to go forward and a wheel to steer. The aim of the game, to hit Emma or run away from Emma hitting her.

Initially Regina had thought the game sounded ridiculous but once a siren sounded in the arena and the vehicle began to move with lights flashing and music blaring she threw caution to the wind. Smashing her way past hapless other drivers she crashed repeatedly into Emma only to suddenly find herself turned around and in the position of being the bait. She grabbed the ridiculously tiny wheel and spun it around in an attempt to escape, racing away from Emma and occasionally glancing behind her to see the crazy blonde just inches behind her. She'd deny it later but at the time she had screamed in delight at the fun she was having.

When the power stopped she smiled happily and thought that maybe the rides weren't so terrible after all. Next on Emma's list was a ghost train, they sat together in another tiny cart and rolled their way past ghosts and ghouls and the odd skeleton. A fair worker jumped out at the end and they both screamed in fright and delight as they got out of the cart.

Emma took a moment to ensure that Regina was also having fun and enquired about the state of her headache, searching chocolate eyes intently for confirmation that Regina spoke the truth about its disappearance. After that Regina went on her first rollercoaster, it was shaped like a caterpillar and the drop was two meters at most but Regina felt like she had conquered the world.

That was what led her to take Emma's hand and pull her towards a spinning ride called a Waltzer which had carts that spun on a platform that also spun as well as being dipped in places. They slid around on the circular hard bench within the ride cart, thighs occasionally bumping together as they held onto the central handrail for support.

Buoyed by the success of that ride Regina told Emma that she was ready for anything and before long found herself being strapped into a standing up ride, a little cage all to herself surrounded by other little cages all on a circle facing a central arm. She couldn't see Emma easily because of an elaborate head restraint but they shouted out words of encouragement to each other as the giant disc started to spin. When Regina was pretty sure she was at the limit of her ability to retain the toffee apple in her stomach the arm started to sway and she realised the whole disc was on a pendulum and was tossing them in directions her inner ear wished didn't exist.

Outside the ride, called Frisbee, Regina struggled to walk in a straight line and Emma purchased some cotton candy and said they should take a break from the rides for a while. Regina didn't want to be beaten by some ride so insisted they continue on their adrenaline rush. As a compromise they ended up on an old fashioned carousel, Emma sat in an ornate golden carriage eating her cotton candy and Regina riding side-saddle on a plastic horse beside her.

Regina asked if Emma was having fun and Emma just smiled at her with one of the biggest grins she could imagine before plucking a piece of pink cotton candy off of the enormous cloud and holding it out for Regina. Knowing Emma wouldn't accept no for an answer Regina leaned forward and took the pink sugar and picked off small bits to eat as she watched the world go round.

A leisurely spin on the ferris wheel, a ride involving cups and saucers and another ride on the caterpillar roller coaster and Regina sadly informed Emma that they needed to think about going home. Emma had been playing games all the way around the fair and she had shot, fished, thrown and guessed her way to a number of tickets which she handed over at the shop on the way out.

Emma had had her eye on a meter high yellow cuddly toy wearing a pair of blue dungarees since she entered the fair but declared she'd need to live at the fair for a year in order to accumulate enough tickets for it. Regina leaned on the counter and smiled at the spotty teenager in charge of distributing the so-called prizes, tucking her hair seductively behind her ear and biting her lip shyly she told him that it was her birthday and that she really, really wanted a minion.

Ten minutes later and Regina was demanding that Emma put 'Dave' in the back seat of the Mercedes because hugging it on her lap was not viable for the journey home due to 'Dave's' round nature.

As they drove away from the fair Emma let out a satisfied sigh as she watched the twinkling lights disappear into the distance.

She looked at Regina, "thank you, that was really amazing."

Regina couldn't help but smile smugly, "you're welcome, dear."

"I thought you were going to throw up after the Frisbee," Emma commented with a laugh.

"I was fine!" Regina proclaimed, "just needed to get my equilibrium back."

"You were green," Emma pointed out.

"After that sickly apple, I'm not surprised," Regina reasoned, "who does that to a piece of fruit?"

Emma laughed and lolled her head on the headrest of her seat as she regarded Regina sweetly, "seriously though, thank you. And thank you for Dave."

"I'm regretting Dave already," Regina said.

"I'm not regretting seeing you flirt yourself a giant minion stuffed toy," Emma winked.

“I got it for you,” Regina explained.

“And I only wanted one so I could give it to you,” Emma told her, “it’s a thing at the fair, you show how skilful you are at the games and you give your date the prize you win.”

“Except in this case I allowed a pimply youth to look down by shirt and got you a prize you couldn’t afford so you could then give it back to me,” Regina said, “some of the customs in this world will continue to baffle me. Dave is very much yours and will live with you.”

“We’ll share him, like Henry,” Emma laughed, “when Henry’s with you I get Dave, when Dave’s with you I get Henry.”

“Are you comparing our son to that?” Regina tossed her head to indicate the toy smiling at her from the back seat.

“No, of course not, Dave eats much less, doesn’t leave smelly socks hidden in his bedding and doesn’t bribe me for information,” Emma smile sweetly.

“True,” Regina agreed, “okay I’ll keep Dave for a few weeks,” she joked.

Chapter 38

The next day Regina arrived at the Mayor's office, her old office, for a meeting with the new Mayor, Snow White. Regina had requested a meeting to discuss getting town hall backing and potentially funding for her new equine therapy idea. She'd discussed it with Bill and he had agreed that it was an excellent idea, it would bring more people to the stables and would help the community.

Now there was one final battle, asking Snow White for help. Regina had originally attempted to push Bill into attending the meeting, claiming that his chances of approval were much higher than hers. But when Bill mumbled something about not understanding the finances or the legal ramifications Regina began to realise that sending him would put her beloved project at risk.

Which was why Regina sat in the waiting room staring at her former assistant who was attempting to pretend she wasn't being stared at by her former Queen and boss. She had arrived early, as usual, and had forgotten about Snow's inability to be timely. Suddenly she began to remember the young princess dashing about the castle in years gone by, late for dinner, late for classes, late waking up.

"Regina, I'm so sorry I'm late," Snow announced as she rushed into the office, "I was across town..."

"No problem," Regina said with a small smile as she stood up.

Snow regarded her with interest, she'd clearly been expecting the brunette to be raging at being kept waiting for nearly ten minutes but instead she seemed calm and Snow wondered if this was because Regina wanted something or because she was genuinely calm.

Snow led them both into the office and towards the comfortable seating area in front of the fire. As Regina sat down Snow noticed something that

caused her breath to hitch and quickly did the best she could to cover her surprise.

“So, what can I do for you?” Snow asked.

“It’s about the stables, you may or may not be aware that Emma and I visited a nearby stables who...” Regina began professionally.

“Oh!” Snow said with excitement, “the equine therapy! Yes, and I presume you want to introduce a similar thing here? What a marvellous idea!”

Regina blinked a little, confused that Snow was so easily agree to her plan and with such enthusiasm. She decided that mentioning the budget would take the edge off of some of that enthusiasm, “well, yes but there are problems, firstly the stables are in a state of disrepair and not up to code. There would be a rather large budget required and then there’s subsidising the costs, obviously the people of Storybrooke would not necessarily be able to afford the necessary equipment or stable time and then the very people who need it most may well be left behind.”

Snow had been listening intently and nodding throughout Regina’s entire budget speech, “couldn’t agree more,” she grinned happily, “it just so happens that last month the council members voted overwhelmingly to increase property taxes in the town, only by half a percent, but the result has been that Mister Gold has paid the town a substantial amount of money. I’m more than happy to use a portion of those funds on this project.”

Regina didn’t know what to say, mainly because she didn’t really understand what was going on. Part of her wondered if Snow was being nice out of fear or if she was being nice due to Regina’s new relationship with Emma but whatever was going on she seemed to be getting everything she wanted. And it confused her greatly.

“Right,” Regina said with a confused tone, “well, that’s good.”

“Great,” Snow announced, “I’ll send Leroy over to the stables early next week to speak to you and Mister Trott to discuss what upgrades need to be made to bring it up to code. Then I think I need to speak to the principle of

the school and probably Doctor Hopper as well to see who they think would benefit so we can get an idea of numbers and their needs.”

“We’ll need volunteers who are willing to learn about horses and their behaviours so they can assist during sessions,” Regina added wondering if her dream wish list might ever be denied by the young woman in front of her.

“Oh, I don’t think that will be a problem,” Snow replied with a knowing grin, “I’m sure I can rustle up some of the girls from the volunteer program at the hospital. Can you think of anything else we need to do to get this started?”

Regina looked from the new Mayor to the fireplace as she thought about what else she might need, she hadn’t even expected to be able to overcome the budget obstacles so the question has truly thrown her.

“Nothing at present,” she decided upon with a small smile of gratitude.

“Wonderful,” Snow smiled, “Emma wouldn’t stop talking about the fair last night, she had a great time.”

Regina started to blush and almost imperceptibly began to fidget, she had already had the protective parent discussion with Charming and she certainly didn’t want the same with Snow. She knew it was an awkward situation, the woman’s ex step-mother was now dating her daughter, surely that would be difficult for anyone to deal with.

“Yes, it was... unique, quite enjoyable,” Regina said simply.

“I’ve never seen her happier,” Snow said seriously, “I know this is a terribly complex situation for you and I, but I want you to know that I approve.”

“You approve?” Regina repeated, she wasn’t sure if she was surprised, angered, mistaken or concerned.

“Yes, despite our history, I’m very glad that you and Emma are together,” Snow nodded to show her sincerity, “you and I have both done things we regret, well, I know I have,” she looked away as the memory of her blunder

haunted her memory, “but I don’t want that to define us forever. I honestly believe that we deserve a second chance to be a family, whatever that may end up looking like. Even if things don’t work out with Emma, which I’m sure they will, we still share Henry in our lives.”

Snow paused, evidently the carefully mapped out words had become jumbled in her nervous desperation to get them out of her system, “what I’m trying to say is, I want us to try to put the past behind us. I know starting afresh is easier said than done and there will always be times when it will be hard to forget the past but I’m willing to try. For Emma and for Henry but also for us. I know you won’t believe me when I say... I miss you, Regina. I was a child and so ridiculously overprotected and naïve that I didn’t see what was right in front of my eyes but I’ve grown up and with that comes maturity and understanding and even though I would never claim to really understand what you went through... I, I now have a better understanding.”

The last thing Regina wanted was for Snow to see her cry, to see her weakness, so she quickly stood up to make a hasty retreat from the office while she still had some façade of being unaffected by the heartfelt words. However she still wanted to offer the brave young woman an olive branch of sorts and gave Snow a small, tight smile as she nodded, “we will endeavour to start again.”

At Snow’s nod of agreement she fled the office leaving Snow to let out a sigh as she closed her eyes and thanked the heavens that she managed to say what she needed to say and without causing Regina any offence.

Remembering what she had seen earlier she quickly looked into the hallway to check that Regina had gone because crossing over to the desk and picking up the phone to dial a number from memory.

“Emma, hey,” she greeted happily, “look, do you have time to meet for lunch, I want to talk to you.”

Chapter 39

Emma sat in a booth at the diner and stirred her coffee with a distant look in her eyes as she remembered the amazing previous evening. She had furiously searched her memory for any indication that she had specifically mentioned her desire to go to a fair when she was a child but found no reference. Which meant that Regina had either stumbled onto a lucky guess or knew the blonde well enough to come to the conclusion that the fair would be something Emma would enjoy.

The evening felt like it had gone by in a flash but when Emma remembered everything they had seen and done she realised they must have been there quite a while. She chuckled to herself as she recalled Regina pulling up outside the apartment at the end of the evening and they sat and made awkward small talk for a few minutes, neither wanting to make the first move towards saying goodnight.

Emma had decided to allow Regina to make the first move towards a goodbye kiss, mainly to reassure herself that Regina wanted it too. After a forced conversation about Henry's school work Regina seemed to have built herself up towards readiness and unconsciously licked her lips and began to lean forward.

Then Mary Margaret had interrupted by an excited rap on the passenger window. She had been walking home with David and had seen the car and couldn't help herself but say hello. Regina jumped back like she had been burnt and Emma slowly turned around with a glare that could melt metal. Mary Margaret had realised her mistake but still invited them both in for coffee, the moment was gone and Regina said that she had to get home to relieve Katherine from babysitting duties.

With a smile Emma had exited the car and dragged Dave out from the back seat and thrust him into Mary Margaret's arms as she leaned back into the car and looked at Regina meaningfully as she said, "we'll finish our conversation later."

The widening of Regina's eyes and the thick swallow she gulped down had Emma smiling happily as she slammed the door and pushed her parents, and Dave, into the apartment. Inside she was grilled about her date and happily spoke of the fair and the fun they'd had. Mary Margaret apologised for interfering at a bad moment but Emma brushed it off, as disappointed as she had been not to get a goodnight kiss, or several, from Regina she was still on cloud nine about the date as a whole.

The sound of a someone entering the booth and taking the seat opposite her shook her from her recollections of the previous night and she looked up to see Mary Margaret.

"Hey," Emma smiled, "what's up."

The brunette looked around carefully to ensure that no one was eavesdropping on them, "it's about Regina," she whispered melodramatically.

Emma grinned as she leaned forward and mock-whispered back "what about her?"

Mary Margaret sat a little taller and gave the diner one last once over before she looked at Emma, "she came to my office earlier, we had a meeting to talk about putting a program of equine therapy in place at the stables but while she was there I noticed something."

Emma's interest was piqued and she leaned forward with a frown, "what was it?"

"She was wearing this leather cuff and it looks a lot like the one that she was wearing when we... we r-rescued her from the cannery," Mary Margaret frowned at the dark memories of that day.

"Ah," Emma replied with a sheepish look, she hadn't wanted to share this information but she knew that Mary Margaret wouldn't let this go without hearing what was going on.

"Ah?" Mary Margaret frowned, "so... you know?"

“Yes,” Emma admitted and leaned further across the table and beckoned for Mary Margaret to do the same, “Regina’s been unwell for months, well, since the incident with Greg. She’s been having problems with really bad headaches.”

“Oh, my!” Mary Margaret whispered, her brow furrowed in concern.

“Because magic is emotion she was kinda having trouble controlling...” Emma started to explain.

Mary Margaret covered her mouth in horror, “oh, poor Regina,” she whispered, “oh, that’s terrible, so... she’s wearing the cuff to... oh my,” she sounded anguished.

“It was her choice,” Emma clarified softly.

“But still, that’s horrible,” Mary Margaret said as her eyes glazed over in memory, “to be reminded of t-that... and to know she’s effectively powerless,” she snapped her head towards Emma and grabbed her arm, “no one must know.”

Emma nodded reassuringly, “that’s why I didn’t tell you, so far it’s just me and Henry and now you. Obviously we don’t want it to get out...”

“Of course,” Mary Margaret nodded empathically before she shook her head again, “poor Regina.”

“She’s doing okay with it,” Emma soothed.

“How can she be?” Mary Margaret asked in distress, “being reminded of... of that.”

Emma regarded her carefully, they’d never spoken in any details about what Mary Margaret had seen when she had used Regina’s tear to find her when she went missing. Emma had heard a small amount of what had happened from David but nothing from her mother.

“Was it...” Emma struggled to know what to say, “was it bad?”

Mary Margaret nodded with tear streaked eyes, “it was awful,” she whispered as the memories flooded back, “I could see through Regina’s eyes and I could feel everything she was feeling. She couldn’t stop it and it was... so... so painful. Oh God, Emma, if she’s got that cuff on again it’s bound to bring back memories and even Regina can’t pretend she’s not affected by that!”

Emma swallowed hard at the strain in Mary Margaret’s voice and again started to berate herself for not being able to capture Greg and Tamara and bring them to some kind of justice.

“I...” Emma found she didn’t really know what to say.

Ruby hesitantly approached the booth with her notepad in her hand, “erm, sorry to interrupt but can I get you ladies anything?”

Mary Margaret looked too upset to speak so Emma turned to the waitress with a smile, “can you just give us another five minutes, Ruby?”

Ruby looked at her best friend and then at Emma and nodded as she walked back to the counter to give them some privacy.

“I thought I was going to die,” Mary Margaret said, “I thought I was going to be within Regina’s mind the moment she died, I thought that no one could stand that. But it was the fact that I could see as Regina could see, feel as Regina could feel... I knew how scared she was even if she refused to show it to Greg, in between the shocks she was thinking about what to say to anger him so that he wouldn’t know how much pain she was in.”

Emma winced a little, she knew that was exactly what Regina would do but she wished that she was wrong and she wished that the brunette had some form of survival skills beyond that of never allowing her weakness to show.

“I always wanted to talk to her about it,” Mary Margaret continued, “but I knew she would be embarrassed to know that I experienced it too. So I never said anything.”

“Probably for the best,” Emma agreed, “she has a thing about showing weakness, doesn’t she?”

Mary Margaret nodded, “look out for her, Emma, especially with that dreadful cuff on. She must feel so afraid.”

Emma put her hands over Mary Margaret’s to comfort her, “I will, I promise,” she said soothingly even though she thought that Regina probably never felt afraid of anything, being the sort to laugh in the face of fear and then give it a jab in the eye for good measure.

Mary Margaret picked up a bit at that and dabbed her eyes a little and then sat up a bit to shake off the horrible feelings, “so, when are you seeing each other again?”

“We didn’t make any plans,” Emma admitted, “we didn’t really get a chance to say goodnight properly,” she raised an eyebrow at her mother.

“I said I was sorry!” Mary Margaret grimaced.

Emma chuckled, “it’s fine, I’ll probably give her a call later today or tomorrow so see if she wants to do anything this weekend.”

Ruby approached the booth again with her pad in hand, “ready now ladies?”

Mother and daughter looked at each other and nodded with a smile before ordering their lunch.

Chapter 40

Somehow the afternoon disappeared from Emma due to a flood of calls, a boundary dispute, a domestic squabble and a petty theft had Emma returning to the Sheriff's station an hour after she was supposed to have gone home.

Putting the telephone onto night service she picked up her personal mobile that she had left on the desk and noticed a couple of missed calls from Henry. With a frown she called him back as she shrugged on her jacket and walked towards the exit.

“Emma,” Henry breathed into the phone in a whisper.

“Hey, Kid, sorry I was out on calls,” she apologised as she locked the door behind her.

“Can you come over?” Henry got straight to the point.

“Erm, sure, I’ll need to grab something to eat first and I...” she started to walk towards the Bug, swinging her keys on her finger as she went.

“No, can you come over now?” Henry pushed, “I’m worried about Mom.”

“What’s going on?” Emma asked as she sped up her motions to get into the car and get the vehicle started.

“I think it’s her headache,” he said quietly as if he were keeping their conversation a secret, “she’s still at the dining room table from lunch. She’s not moved since I got home from school.”

Emma glanced at the clock on the Bug that told her it was six in the evening and that meant Regina had been sat there for at least three hours, “okay, I’ll be there in five,” she told him.

“I’ll let you in,” he said as he disconnected the call.

Emma hauled the heavy steering wheel around as she reversed out of her parking space and threw the car into gear, her mind was fraught with worry and she cursed herself for not checking in on Regina earlier like she had intended to. Each of the three traffic lights she had to pass were at red and she drummed her fingers heavily on the steering wheel as she waited for them to change. Part of her wished she'd taken the cruiser and part of her wondered if anyone would give a damn if she ran the red lights anyway.

When she finally pulled onto the driveway it seemed like much time had passed but in reality it had only been six minutes. Regardless Henry's shadow could be seen loitering nervously in the window to Regina's study as it overlooked the driveway and as soon as she pulled up she saw him leave, presumably to make his way to the front door.

As she got to the door it opened and Emma looked up at Henry's worried face and then behind him to the grand dining room table that could be seen from the front door. At the head of the table and facing her was Regina, she sat at the table with her head in her hands.

Emma quickly entered the house and climbed the stairs into the hallway and made her way towards the brunette. As she got closer she could see Regina's fingers were clutching at her head in pain as they threaded into between her brown locks of hair. An uneaten sandwich on a plate has been pushed to one side and Regina's elbows were balanced on the table restricting any view of her face.

"Henry, can you get a glass of water?" Emma whispered and the boy nodded as he realised he was being dismissed for a few minutes so Emma could ascertain what was wrong.

As soon as he was gone Emma crouched beside Regina looked up at her as she softly whispered, "Regina?"

Regina shook her head ever so slightly, "hurts," she mumbled.

"Can you walk?" Emma said as she rolled her shoulders with the intention of carrying the brunette if she said no.

“Where?” Regina mumbled through clenched teeth.

“To bed,” Emma said softly.

Regina took a deep breath and slowly removed her hands from her head and Emma could see angry red marks where Regina’s fingers had been dug into her temples. Emma could also see her wet and red face that was contorting in pain, she stood to one side and gently helped Regina to her feet. The brunette swayed a little and Emma wrapped her arms around her waist and assisted her slowly towards the stairs, as they got towards the bright light of the hallway Regina raised a hand to protect herself from the glare.

It took a while but soon enough Emma had Regina sat up in her bed, she had created a mountain of pillows for Regina to lean back against to make sure she was as comfortable as possible. Henry loitered in the hallway with a glass of water, uncertain of what to do and terrified of seeing his usually strong mother in such a state.

Emma exited the bedroom and noticed Henry standing there, she took the glass from his hand and placed it on the hallway table and nodded her head for him to follow her downstairs. Once they got to the kitchen Henry spoke, “is she okay? What’s going on?”

“I think she has a migraine,” Emma said as she looked around the kitchen, “I need a hot water bottle, some lemons if there are any, what other flavours of tea does she have?”

“What’s a migraine?” Henry asked as he opened a drawer and pulled out a pink furry hot water bottle he had bought his mother for Christmas one year.

“It’s like a really bad headache,” Emma explained as she looked at the tea cupboard and started pushing aside boxes to look at what was there, “aha,” she said as she found what she was looking for and pulled out the box.

“Peppermint?” Henry frowned.

“I did a bit of reading the other day on natural headache cures, I don’t know if they work but I’m going to try them,” Emma told him as she filled the

kettle. Henry worried the edges of the hot water bottle and looked around the kitchen helplessly.

Emma put the kettle on to boil and took him by the shoulders and looked sincerely into his eyes, “she’s going to be just fine, she’s just been suffering with a horrible headache non-stop today so she’s really out of energy and in pain. But you did the right thing in calling me and I’m going to take care of her, okay?”

Henry brightened a little and nodded as Emma stood up. She ruffled his hair and looked around the kitchen, “are there any lemons? And can you pick a nice apple out from the bowl?”

Ten minutes later Emma re-entered Regina’s bedroom with a tray consisting of a jug of water with sliced lemons bobbing in the liquid, a cup of peppermint tea, a hot water bottle and an apple on a plate with a paring knife. Henry had been granted a late night to unwind and Emma told him to watch television downstairs until she came to find him and update him on the situation.

Regina had her eyes firmly closed and her head pushed back into the soft pillows, the evening sun was just bright enough to lighten the room so Emma placed the tray quietly down and then crossed the room to close the blinds plunging the room into darkness. She turned on a small lamp on the opposite side of the room and shrugged out of her leather jacket and placed it half over the light to cause a muted glow in the room.

Regina cracked her eyes open and looked at Emma with thanks and Emma crossed back to the bed and picked up the water jug with lemons and poured a glass, “here,” she said in a soft tone to prevent from causing Regina any further pain, “drink as much of this as you can and then I have some peppermint tea for you to try.”

“I tried to replenish my fluids this morning, it didn’t help,” Regina croaked as she took the glass and began to drink the lemon water.

“I’m hoping the lemon and the peppermint will help,” Emma said as she sat on the edge of the bed, “and I have another plan as well.”

Emma bent forward and started to undo the laces on her boots and Regina raised an eyebrow at the movement as Emma pulled off one knee-high boot.

“Isn’t it a little early in our involvement for that?” Regina quipped.

Emma smiled as she pulled off the other boot, “some do say that an orgasm provides an endorphin rush which helps dull the pain of a headache.”

Regina coughed a little on her water and a bright blush covered her cheeks and Emma thought it adorable that the former Evil Queen was so susceptible to blushing. Emma stood up and took the empty glass from Regina’s hand and then gently handed her the hot peppermint tea.

“What I had in mind,” Emma explained quietly, “was a scalp massage while you have this hot water bottle on your neck.”

Regina had taken a gulp of tea when she shook her head as she swallowed, “I can’t ask you to do that.”

“You’re not asking,” Emma told her, “I’m offering, I want to help you.”

Regina quickly finished her tea, occasionally wincing at the pain in her head and when she finished Emma took the mug from her. Emma helped Regina to turn her position so she was laying sideways across the bed with her head near the edge where Emma had previously been sitting.

Checking the temperature first with the back of her hand Emma placed the hot water bottle under Regina’s neck and shoulders and then lifted a chair from the other side of the room and placed it facing Regina’s head. She sat down and noticed that Regina was watching her warily and she smiled at the upside down face below her, “if you’re uncomfortable at any point, I’ll stop.”

“I’m uncomfortable,” Regina intoned instantly.

“I’m not even touching you yet,” Emma admonished with a small sigh.

“I know, I’m just not used to this sort of thing,” Regina admitted shyly.

“Well, let me start and we’ll see how you get on,” Emma said and quickly brought her hands up to massage the brunette’s scalp. She’d read up on the technique a while ago and was pleased she might now be able to impress Regina with her skills.

Emma ran her fingers through brown hair from Regina’s temples towards the back of her head several times in a slow but firm movement. Regina’s eyes flickered closed, resigned that Emma would be proceeding and clearly wanting to attempt to relax despite the unfamiliar touch.

After a few minutes Emma began to rotate the tops for her index and middle fingers in small circles over Regina’s temples, Regina’s mouth fell open and a small sigh escaped and Emma smiled in satisfaction. After a while Emma moved her fingertips over the whole of Regina’s forehead before returning to the temples and then gently moving in towards the crown of Regina’s head. She then repeated the whole procedure but this time rubbing circles in the opposite direction.

Regina’s mouth released small sighs and even the odd moan and Emma shifted in her seat to attempt to keep her focus on the massage. Twenty minutes later and Emma began to untangle her now-numb fingers from Regina’s hair and Regina’s eyes fluttered open.

“That was extraordinary,” she whispered as she looked at Emma upside down standing above her.

“How’s the headache?” Emma questioned.

“Almost gone,” Regina admitted with a smile.

Emma breathed a sigh of relief and helped Regina to sit up and then moved to put the chair back while Regina shuffled back into a seated position against the pillows. Emma poured another lemon water and handed Regina the glass and then placed the plate with the apple and the knife beside her, “you should eat this as well and then try to get some sleep.”

Regina looked like she was about to argue so Emma quickly cut in, “I’ll talk to Henry and get him to bed for an early night and I’ll clear up

downstairs.”

“You don’t need...” Regina started.

“I want to,” Emma said firmly with a smile at Regina’s stubborn behaviour.

Before Emma knew what she was doing she had stepped forward and placed her hand on the headboard behind Regina for support and placed a loving kiss on the brunette’s forehead.

“I’ll sort Henry out and then I’ll be back to tuck you in,” she winked.

Regina gave a small chuckle and watched as Emma left the room.

Emma got downstairs and was surprised to see that the kitchen and dining room had already been cleaned and Henry was putting the last item into the dishwasher, she looked around with a confused frown and Henry shrugged, “I clean when I’m nervous.”

“You’re going to make someone very happy when you grow up,” Emma chuckled, “your Mom is feeling much better, can you go in and give her a kiss goodnight or whatever it is you guys do and then get ready for bed? You can read or play your game for a while but whatever you do try to be quiet.”

Henry nodded and threw his arms around her and hugged her tightly, “thanks Mom,” he told her, “are you... are you staying?”

“No,” Emma shook her head, “but I’ll be back first thing in the morning.”

Henry nodded his understanding and quickly went upstairs to see Regina and to say goodnight. Emma checked the backdoor was locked and then made her way meticulously through each room to check any windows and doors were closed. When she was done she went back upstairs and saw that Henry was in bed reading she gave him a smile from the door and mouthed that she loved him and he smiled and repeated the phrase back to her.

Closing Henry’s door she turned back to Regina’s room and softly knocked, Regina’s voice softly asked her to come in. When Emma entered

she was relieved to see that Regina was looking much improved and was eating slices of the apple that Emma had given to her.

Regina smiled at her, “hello.”

“Hello,” Emma smiled back, “do you need anything else? I’m thinking of heading off but I’ll be back first thing in the morning.”

“You don’t...” Regina started but Emma’s glare stopped her in her tracks and she nodded, “first thing in the morning it is.”

Emma walked over to her leather jacket and plucked it away from the light and tucked it under her arm before making another stop at the side of Regina’s bed to pick up her discarded boots.

“Goodnight, Regina,” she whispered softly as she leaned forward and this time kissed Regina softly on the lips. It lasted just a few seconds but it was long enough for Emma to feel quite shaken by the strength of her emotion.

“Goodnight, Emma and thank you,” Regina replied with a hint of a blush, the kiss and the mood cleared affecting her too.

Emma smiled and exited the bedroom and drew the door closed behind her with a small sigh of relief. It hadn’t been how she’d expected to spend the evening and her worry for the brunette had just increased ten-fold. She knew Regina wouldn’t like it but it was time for action, the brunette couldn’t carry on like this much longer so tomorrow Emma had to be strong and convince Regina to get help.

Chapter 41

With an aggravated sigh Regina finally kicked off the bed covers and sat up in bed. Nightmares had kept her awake most of the night which was normal protocol lately but following the exhausting migraine attack the day before she felt unusually drained and had hoped that sleep would come for her.

As the beginnings of daylight started to be visible through the closed curtains she decided that enough was enough and got out of bed and picked up a satin robe from the back of her bedroom door and put it on over her matching pyjamas.

Exiting her bedroom she quickly checked on Henry and smiled at his sleeping form before closing his door again and then making her way to the kitchen. Since Emma's discussion about the medication she had been taking and the research she had done about accidental overdoses she had completely stopped taking medicines. She prepared the coffee maker and idly wondered if that would be the next thing that Emma would ban from her if the headaches continued.

Emma. As the coffee maker did its duty Regina thought about the blonde's mercy dash the previous evening. Regina had been in such pain that she hadn't thought for a second about arguing with Emma when she arrived and immediately started to take charge, in fact it had been nice knowing that someone was there to look out for her and take control. Regina shook her head in confusion, previously she would have never wanted to give up that kind of control to someone else.

She had lived a large portion of her life under various people's command from her mother to her husband to Rumpelstiltskin and the curse was her freedom to finally live her own life. It was surprising to her that she had willingly given up that control just because of an ailment. She had been sick before and never would it have occurred to her to allow anyone into her home and boss her around.

Pouring the coffee into a large mug and heading into her study she began to muse over why last night she had finally caved. True, the migraine had been prolonged and even Henry's return from school had not been enough to provide her with the strength to overcome it for a brief while.

As she walked around the desk with her coffee in one hand she plucked the calendar off of the wall with the other and flipped the month to the one previous and looked at her very own Saviour, Emma Swan. She sat down as she leaned her head in her hand as she stared at the arrest scene photograph of her... her what? It was so early in their, whatever it was, that it didn't seem proper to label it just yet. The sinking feeling in her stomach was unfamiliar, the whole situation was unfamiliar.

Up until a week ago she had never been on a date and never romantically kissed a woman. Now she had done both more than once and she gazed down at the photograph and gently stroked the photograph with the back of her fingers. She had willingly given control over to Emma because she trusted her, it was as simple as that. When that dramatic shift in their relationship had actually taken place she still wasn't sure but she did know that she had gone from despising the woman to trusting her with her life.

With a sigh she sat back in her office chair and hugged the steaming mug of coffee to her chest and closed her eyes. She was scared. The headaches were now all-consuming and the stress was beginning to get to her. Whereas before she was able to push the worry to one side and concentrate on little things like going riding, watching Henry play football or cleaning the house. Now they started to seep into everyday life.

But being with Emma seemed to soothe them. The date at the stables and the date at the fair had both been practically headache free. In fact the amount of sugar she consumed at the fair and the number of directions the rides violently threw her body in should have caused a splitting headache but they didn't. She wasn't sure whether it was the expertly administered scalp massage or simply Emma's calming presence that had cured her the previous night.

She had read about the obvious link between stress and headaches many a time while she had researched what could be wrong with her. Maybe it was

the new relationship with Emma causing her to be so preoccupied with being happy that she didn't even notice the headaches. It was confusing and the online forums she had trawled through night after night only ended up giving her conflicted views of which terrible illness she was imminently going to die from.

She sighed and put her coffee mug down and looked again at the picture and a fond smile covered her face. She bit her lip as her eyes hesitantly flicked up to the door and then back to the calendar, she counted the pages and turned the calendar to February and looked at the photograph with a thick swallow.

The photograph didn't leave much to the imagination, the crime scene tape was indeed used sparingly and Emma's toned arms and stomach were clearly visible for all to see. Regina quickly closed the calendar and took a shaky sip of coffee to try to calm herself. She'd not experienced these lusty feelings of sexuality since before her marriage when she was young and Daniel's strong arms lifting a heavy saddle was all it took to make her weak at the knees.

Her marriage to Leopold and subsequent failed attempts for another heir had firmly removed any notion that sex could be pleasurable, in her mind it had become something mechanical and only to procreate. And when it became clear that she was defective and could not produce another child for the Kingdom, Regina was almost grateful that the whole ordeal would now come to an end.

It was only recently that she had begun to feel unfamiliar sensations that possibly had a sexual overtone and all those times occurred around Emma Swan. She knew this was something that she would have to discuss with Emma and she didn't look forward to it. She knew that as time went on Emma would have expectations of her and she wasn't sure if she could meet them, an awkward discussion about Emma's grandfather was on the cards and Regina shivered at the thought.

She was shaken out of her thoughts by the telephone on her desk ringing and she quickly moved to answer it, "hello?"

"It's me," Emma's voice sounded softly from the other line.

“Oh,” Regina looked at the clock on the wall with confusion, it was half past six in the morning and she immediately wondered why Emma was calling her, “is everything okay?”

“Yeah, I’m... er, I’m kinda outside,” Emma admitted.

Regina frowned and stood up and walked over to the window and saw the yellow Bug sat on the driveway with Emma looking directly at her.

“Hi,” she waved at Regina.

“Good morning,” Regina smiled back.

“Can I come in?” Emma asked shyly and Regina nodded.

“I’ll open the door,” the brunette said as she hung up the call.

Chapter 42

Regina tied the robe tighter around her waist as she opened the front door and let Emma in, “please don’t tell me you’ve been there all night?”

Emma shook her head, “no, about an hour... I couldn’t sleep and I was worried about you. How are you feeling?”

“Much improved,” Regina said with a reassuring smile but Emma’s pensive expression didn’t change.

“Regina...” Emma started with a sigh.

“Let’s sit in the study,” Regina said softly and turned away from Emma and walked towards the study forcing the blonde to follow her.

Once in the study Regina sat on the sofa and Emma took her now customary place in the armchair opposite her. They both sat silently for a few moments while they considered what they wanted to say, both nervous of the other’s reaction.

“Look,” Emma finally said, “I’m... I’m just going to come out with it because it’s been going around and around my mind a-and I need you to know what I’m thinking, okay?”

Regina nodded, partially relieved that she wasn’t the one who had to start but still concerned over the direction the conversation may take.

Emma got to her feet and paced the room while refusing to make eye contact with Regina in an attempt to bolster up enough strength to say what she needed to get out.

“I...” she started and then paused and started again, “these, these last few days... Jesus this is hard.”

“Take your time,” Regina whispered, she had no idea what Emma was about to say but no matter the outcome she didn’t want to see Emma in such distress.

“Yesterday really scared me, when Henry called me I nearly broke every traffic violation you can think of to get here,” Emma admitted, “and when I did get here I was... I was so fucking scared. I wanted to scoop you up and take you to the hospital there and then but I knew I couldn’t, I tried to be strong for you and for Henry but... it really scared me, Regina,” she looked at the brunette with bright, wet eyes.

“Emma, I’m so sorry I put you in that situation,” Regina started but stopped when Emma held her hand up indicating she had more to say.

“It wasn’t until I got home and started thinking about things that I realised why it scared me so much,” Emma continued to pace and looked around the room rather than at Regina’s face.

“I... I dunno things just started to come together and that was just as frightening. I’m not very good at this kind of thing, I’m not very good at understanding relationships and I’m certainly not very good at being in one,” Emma ran a hand through her hair and Regina shifted uncomfortably on the sofa as she worried about which direction this confession was headed in.

“But... the two dates, the two dates we’ve been on have been more than I could ever wish for,” Emma looked into Regina’s surprised eyes, “I have never felt so...” she looked away and waved her arms around in a desperate attempt to find the right words, “important. Like I mattered, you know? I’ve never had that. I felt like someone cared for me. I felt like you cared for me. And I realised that... I care for you, a lot. More than I thought it was possible for me to care for someone else. I’ve always been careful about getting too close to someone, I know what it feels like when you suddenly get discarded. I’ve protected myself from that pain.”

Regina wanted to speak, she desperately wanted to cross the room and hold Emma and tell her that everything would be okay but she could see the young woman desperately needed to have an outlet for her confused feelings.

“Last night I was on autopilot,” Emma continued speaking and continued pacing, “I saw the situation and I dealt with it and once I knew you were okay I went home but then I couldn’t stop thinking about it. I... I couldn’t stop thinking about you. And then I got scared because I realised how much you mean to me, like all of a sudden you’re all I can think about, you’re all I care about. And I didn’t get any fucking warning it was going to happen, it was just like boom, there ya go, have a truckload of feelings for this woman.”

“Emma,” Regina said softly.

“And I know,” Emma carried on, “that this is so... fast and so weird and I don’t get it myself but you mean something to me, Regina, you... you have a piece of me and I leave it behind when I’m not with you and when I’m with you I feel whole, I feel safe and loved and happy.”

“Emma,” Regina stood up tentatively but Emma continued to pace.

“So, I needed to tell you, because if you’re having second thoughts or you don’t feel the same or... I dunno... this is just us being friends... then I need to know because I need to stop this now or...I... I don’t know what will happen to me... I can’t take...” Emma whispered as tears started to fall down her cheeks and she stopped pacing and held onto the back of the arm chair for support.

Regina crossed the room in a flash and pulled Emma into her arms and held her tightly, feeling the tears quickly seeping through her robe and pyjamas and soaking her shoulder.

“Oh, Emma, darling,” Regina cooed softly, “I feel the same, I absolutely feel the same.”

Regina felt the blonde sag against her in relief but the tears still fell and Regina held her tightly and rubbed gentle circles on her back.

“I can’t lose you, Regina, not now,” Emma whispered into her shoulder, “I’m so scared about what is happening to you.”

“I’m not going anywhere,” Regina said quietly but Emma pulled back quickly from the embrace and frowned.

“You can’t promise that,” Emma said bitterly, “we both know those headaches are serious, we both know that it could... could...”

Regina took another step forward and wrapped Emma in another tight embrace, “shh, shh, it’s okay,” she calmed the blonde again, “I... want you to help me get it checked out.”

Emma pulled out of the embrace again and held Regina’s face in her hands, “really? Y-you will?”

Regina gave a small nod, “I don’t want to lose you either,” she whispered, “but I’m not saying it’s going to be easy. I... I’m feeling the start of a panic attack just thinking about it.”

Emma knew how hard it was for the usually strong brunette to admit such a thing and nodded her understanding.

“Emma,” Regina sighed softly, “there’s... a few things I need to tell you. I was literally thinking about them before you rang, and it seems we are on the same page so I want to... well, need to, tell you some things. About me. About my history. Things you should know and things that may go some way to explaining my... phobia.”

Emma still held Regina’s head lightly in her hands and used her thumbs to dry the few small tears that had fallen from her eyes, “okay, I want to hear everything,” Emma said sincerely.

“Oh I very much think you’ll regret that,” Regina said with a sad smile as she took a step back and gestured for Emma to sit with her on the sofa.

Chapter 43

Emma flopped heavily on the sofa and started to wipe the tears away from her eyes and cheeks with her hands in an attempt to not look like the mess she felt. Regina sat primly on the edge of the sofa and a little way from Emma to give the blonde some space and also to give herself some space to compose herself for the upcoming conversation.

“It’s important to understand,” Regina started formally, as if giving an address rather than confiding her life story, “that life in the Enchanted Forest was very different to life here. Things were, in many ways, antiquated. I realise, having lived in this world and experienced its culture for a number of years, that the old world, my world, may seem, to some, exhilarating and maybe even fun.”

Emma nodded, she could understand that the thought of living in castles and spending all day riding horses through forests could seem like fun. She knew that Henry had often expressed a desire to at least see the Enchanted Forest as he equated it to many movies and books, but once Emma had spoken of the lack of electricity and running water he soon bored of the idea.

“While magic was rife and things were certainly not dull, there was a darker side to living there,” Regina’s breath hitched as she began to get to the point of her introduction and could no longer skirt around the edge of what she wished to say.

“My birth, my life,” Regina stared at her hands in her lap intently to not make eye contact with Emma, “was planned meticulously by my mother. The only reason for my being was to be Queen.”

Emma wanted to interrupt, wanted to say how unfair that notion was but she knew that Regina was finding this hard enough and, like Emma had done moments before, just need to vent.

“My mother herself had attempted to gain power but for various reasons I won’t go into now she was unable and that was when her plans changed. She

planned to have a child, one that she could mould and groom and eventually place into a position of power with her right beside that child, presumably using them as a puppet,” Regina shrugged, luckily she had managed to get rid of her mother before anything like that happened.

“Every single moment of my childhood was planned for me to be a Queen, I never interacted with other children and the only people I saw, beside my parents, were tutors and servants. I was taught everything that a Queen should excel in, reading, writing, politics, history as well as music, etiquette, dancing and horse riding. I knew of nothing but how to be a Queen, I spoke to no one about anything else,” Regina went silent for a moment as she began to think about those long and lonely days.

She took a deep and shaky breath before continuing, “you... you know about Daniel, of course,” she played with the ring on her finger, the ring that Emma had returned for her.

“Yes,” Emma said in a whisper and nodded.

“I... I won’t speak of that,” Regina said quietly, “not now at any rate.”

Emma nodded her understanding, Daniel was the start of everything for Regina and Emma knew that one day Regina would tell her more but this wouldn’t be that day.

“My mother set up a meeting between myself and the King, using your mother as bait,” Regina waved her hand distractedly to gloss over the details, luckily Emma had heard them before from her mother so knew about the runaway horse.

“We married when I was eighteen, which was considered old in those days,” Regina laughed softly to herself, “my mother had me believe that I was becoming stale and needed to marry soon or I would forever be alone. Another layer of her psychological arsenal to keep me under her control, I’m sure she had already planned ways and means to get me to be Queen by that time.”

“The King,” Regina paused as she considered her words, “the King was a kind and benevolent man. He was considered a wonderful King, adored by his people, fair and just. However he was not a patient man and he was typical of so many men in positions of power at that time and place, he had no concept of emotions or feelings.”

Emma tensed up, she knew they were getting to the core of the matter and she didn’t know if she would be able to keep her temper under control if things turned in the direction she was expecting. Digging her fingers into her palms she attempted to remain immobile and impassive to help Regina finally release the pent up words.

“Mother never prepared me for some of the more, personal, duties for a Queen. Ridiculous when you consider it, I was eighteen and didn’t know how babies were made but knew I was supposed to make one,” Regina chuckled but there was no humour there, “the King came to me on our wedding night and... well, you know.”

Emma controlled her breathing as best she could and simply lowered her head in sympathy and understanding.

“He returned every night for the first two weeks,” Regina said so quietly Emma could barely hear her.

Regina coughed a little and then spoke with more authority as she detached herself from the subject, “it was theorised back then that repeated attempts would not only increase the chance of pregnancy but also reinforce the child, increase its chances of survival.”

“I became pregnant,” Regina said wistfully, “and two months later the child was lost. I was still only eighteen and I didn’t understand what was happening, there was a lot of blood and... well, the doctor came.”

With a deep sigh Regina continued, “he... touched me in places I didn’t believe was proper for a man other than my husband to touch me. Now I understand he was just doing his job but he was cold and harsh and spoke to me as if I were a childish fool. Up until then I was treated like a Queen by

everyone but this... this man... he spoke down to me, berated me for ‘expelling the King’s seed’”

Emma sprang to her feet and Regina jumped back at the shock of the movement. Emma curled her hand into a fist and placed it in front of her mouth as she took a couple of deep breaths to calm herself before turning to Regina with an apologetic look, “I’m sorry, please... go on...”

Regina looked at her for a moment to assure herself that Emma really did want her to continue, “this happened frequently over the first couple of years. The King would try harder and harder to impregnate me and after a few weeks or months I would lose the child. Clearly the King had already had a child so the fault was with me. The doctor would return and... I can still see him looking at the... the... baby, well, it wasn’t really a baby, whatever it was, he’d look at it and then look at me like I was to blame.”

“Is he here?” Emma suddenly spoke, her fists quivering in rage, “is he, is he in Storybrooke?”

Regina shook her head slowly, “no, I dealt with him many years ago.”

Emma nodded frantically, “good, good,” she said distractedly as she found herself hoping that dealt with meant killed because nothing else would suffice as far as she was concerned at that moment in time.

“Emma,” Regina said softly, “please sit down, I don’t want to tell you this if it will make you so upset.”

Emma quickly sat down but her face still showed her anguish as she struggled to come to terms with what she was hearing and attempted to think of ways to make it better.

“Anyway,” Regina decided to gloss over the worst of the story, “the more I miscarried the more my life was entwined with the doctor’s. Leopold thought the man a genius and he was given carte blanche to do whatever he thought would work to produce an heir.”

“But you never did,” Emma supplied, hoping for confirmation and not some secretive uncle in her life.

“No, I never did,” Regina confirmed, “the isolation of the palace and the lack of any solace certainly contributed towards my downwards turn, the path to becoming dark.”

Emma worried her lip as she stared at her hands that she was twisting in her lap as she struggled to find something useful to say. Regina leant forward and placed her hand top of Emma’s as she continued, “so, that is why I have a dread of medical practitioners.”

She hesitated for a moment before continuing, “and that is also why I wish to take our relationship, the physical side of it, slowly,” she pulled her hand back into her own lap and sighed as she inclined her head and closed her eyes and uttered, “I have very little experience and that that I do have was not entirely pleasant. I’m unused to these... these feelings and although I wish to explore them I wish to do so slowly.”

Emma looked up and stared at Regina’s lowered head and hesitantly reached her hand forward to gently touch Regina’s shoulder compassionately, “I’m patient,” she said softly, “we can take any pace you like, I won’t be offended and I won’t be cross, I care about you, Regina.”

Regina looked up and smiled a small smile, “thank you,” she whispered, “and I care about you too. I didn’t wish to upset you but I hope you understand why I have shared these things with you.”

Emma nodded, “I know it wasn’t easy, it wasn’t easy to hear so I can’t imagine what it was like to say. But I want you to know that I really appreciate it.”

Regina nodded and shifted herself closer to the blonde, Emma moved at the same time and they met in the middle of the sofa and wrapped their arms tightly around each other. Both of them were reeling from the intense outpouring of emotions they had both been a part of and all they could do was cling to the other tightly while the dust metaphorically settled.

After a seemingly long amount of time had passed, Emma let go and pulled back, “about these headaches...” she started, bracing herself for whatever backlash Regina might come back with.

“Yes,” Regina said with a small nod, “as much as it pains to me to say this, I think we need your mother.”

Chapter 44

“My mother?” Emma asked in utter confusion, “like, like Snow White... Mary Margaret?”

Regina nodded and stood up from the sofa and brushed down the wrinkles from her clothing now suddenly conscious that she was wearing her pyjamas and satin robe, “that’s the one,” she said quietly.

“I’m sorry, you’ve completely lost me, why do we need my mother?” Emma frowned.

Regina leaned on the back of the armchair and looked at Emma pensively, “I... I think she is the best person to accompany me to the hospital.”

“Are you serious? Have you had a stroke or something?” Emma looked at her in shock.

“I assure you I’m deadly serious, Emma,” Regina sighed as she leaned heavily on the back of the chair and took a couple of deep breaths, “I don’t want you or Henry to see me if... if I get into a state. I’d be too embarrassed and...” she closed her eyes and bowed her head, “and I know how to manipulate you both.”

Emma blinked. The honesty was certainly a surprise but a welcome one.

“Snow will see right through me and she’ll do what she needs to do no matter what,” Regina said softly as she looked up at Emma sadly, “and I think I’ll be stronger if I’m with her because I won’t want to admit any weakness to her of all people.”

“Let me get this right because I’m running a bit low on sleep and high on emotions here,” Emma said as she put her hand out to silence Regina, “you want my mother to accompany you to the hospital? Am I getting that right?”

Regina nodded, “yes.”

Emma flopped back on the sofa and shook her head in surprise, “would never have seen that coming.”

“But you understand my reasons?” Regina asked carefully.

“Yeah, it makes sense,” Emma said quietly.

“You’re not upset with me are you?” Regina worried.

“No,” Emma answered quickly and smiled, “just a bit taken aback by it, I guess, but it makes sense. She won’t walk on eggshells around you like Henry and I would and you’ll put on more bravado because it’s her, I get it.”

Regina breathed a small sigh of relief, she had been considering this idea all evening and hadn’t thought about a good way in which to explain it to Emma but was relieved that Emma seemed to get it.

“But she’ll have to know about my illness,” Regina said softly, “and this,” she held up her arm and gently shook her loose sleeve to show the leather cuff.

“Ah,” Emma bit her lip with worry.

“Ah, what?” Regina asked with a sigh.

“She knows,” Emma responded with a wince.

Regina’s eyes narrowed and she folded her arms, “she knows what?”

“About the cuff,” Emma winced again, “and the headaches,” she added quietly.

“Emma,” Regina sighed and pinched the bridge of her nose in frustration.

“You just said yourself she needs to know and... well... she already knows so that’s good right?” Emma smiled hopefully.

“You told her...” Regina said sadly.

“No,” Emma stood up quickly, “well, yes, but I only told her because she noticed the cuff and she was worried about you. After your meeting with her yesterday she summoned me to lunch and told me about it because she was worried about you. I couldn’t think of anything to tell her so I told her the truth...”

Regina folded her arms and turned away, “so she knows about... when I...”

Emma frowned and looked at Regina’s back as she struggled to keep up with Regina’s trail of thought.

“When you what?” Emma asked.

“When... I lost control, your... your concussion,” Regina said quietly.

“Oh! No,” Emma stepped towards Regina and gently turned her round, “no, I never told her that and I will never tell anyone. That was between you and me, no one else needs to know, they wouldn’t understand.”

Regina looked at Emma and searched her face for the truth and when she found it she took a step forward, arms still folded across her chest and Emma wrapped her up in a comforting embrace.

“Thank you,” Regina whispered.

“I didn’t want to tell her, I didn’t seek her out to tell her, but she knows. And she won’t tell anyone, she really does understand the seriousness of the situation if anyone else finds out about the cuff, I swear,” Emma promised.

Regina sniffed, “I’ll admit her proficiency in maintaining a confidence has improved in the last thirty odd years.”

Emma placed a soft kiss in Regina’s hair and smiled before letting her go and saying, “right, go and get dressed and I’ll go and get her.”

Regina paled significantly, “what? Now?”

“Yes, now,” Emma said firmly.

“But, but it’s... it’s early and I need to... I need to make Henry his breakfast and I have things to do and she may be busy...” Regina started to panic.

“She’s not busy and I’ll make Henry his breakfast when I watch him while you go and get checked out,” Emma reasoned.

“But it may not be convenient, at the hospital, I mean...” Regina continued.

“You’re both Queen’s and Mayor’s, they’ll drop everything and see you immediately,” Emma said, “besides it’s a small town, I’m sure it will be quiet in there this morning anyway.”

“But,” Regina started.

“Get dressed,” Emma commanded, “or I’m sure Mary Margaret will happily drag you there in your pyjamas. I’ll be back within the hour, don’t run away because... ya know... she’ll always find you.”

Emma snorted a small laugh as she quickly left the study.

Chapter 45

Of course Regina had considered multiple escape plans in the thirty five minutes it took for Emma and Snow to return. She had woken Henry with a suggestion of going to New York for a week, seeing the sights and having some much deserved time off. Henry had told her that Emma had text her ten minutes previously to warn him that Regina might be attempting escape.

With a sigh and a huff Regina retreated back to her bedroom and quickly got dressed in a black pant suit with white shirt, she applied her makeup and styled her hair in her previous Mayoral manner. The result was the fierce look of the Mayor and former Queen that she had spent years perfecting, looking at her reflection in the mirror she practiced her bored look and then a quick sneer and was pleased that the effect hadn't been lost over time.

The sound of a car pulling up caused her to cross her bedroom and look out of the window and sigh as Emma's yellow Bug and Snow' station wagon pulled up outside the house.

Emma jumped out of the Bug and jogged up the path with a determined look and rang the doorbell, Henry was downstairs and let her in. Regina made her way to the stairwell and overheard the end of a conversation between the two of them where Emma promised the boy that she'd explain everything later.

Regina quickly made her way down the stairs and looked from Henry to Emma with an expression that clearly voiced her displeasure.

She opened her mouth to speak and was interrupted by Snow honking the horn on her station wagon loudly and repeatedly. She turned towards the open door and stared at the younger woman and if looks could kill Snow would have instantly perished.

“What is she doing?” Regina screeched with emphasise on the first word.

“Waiting for you,” Emma said softly, her bravery wavering at the sight of a truly incensed Regina and suddenly she was happy to not be accompanying her.

Regina opened her mouth to reply and a loud and continuous horn sounded and drowned out whatever diatribe was spilling from her lips. With fury in her eyes she spun on her heel and stormed towards the station wagon.

Emma held Henry in front of her body as they both looked at Regina railing at Snow as Snow looked out of the window and shouted back.

“What is going on?” Henry asked again.

“Your grandma is taking your mom to the hospital to get her headaches checked out,” Emma explained softly.

“Really?” Henry looked up with a small smile on his face.

“Yeah, really,” Emma looked down at him and smiled, “I’m just a little concerned that your grandma’s approach might end up with her staying in the hospital.”

Over at the station wagon Snow was pouting like she was one hundred and fifty percent done with Regina’s yelling at her. Snow sighed as she covered each expletive that left Regina’s mouth with a honk of her horn which only seemed to incense Regina all the more.

“Oh, just get in!” Snow yelled out of the open car window and stared at Regina challengingly.

Regina stared at her for a moment as Snow’s hand paused over the horn menacingly and Regina looked around the street knowing that her neighbours were beginning to curtain-twitch in their direction.

With a sigh she stormed to the passenger door and flung the door open and got in and slammed the door closed.

“Thank you,” Snow said sarcastically as she started the car and waved goodbye to Emma and Henry who were watching the scene with part fear and

part interest.

“I’ve called the hospital,” Snow said simply, “I have spoken with Doctor Whale about your headaches and your desire to spend as little time as possible in the hospital, I didn’t go into too much detail about that. We’re going to go in, go straight to X-ray and you are going to have a CT scan and then leave again, okay?”

Snow’s tone was firm and demanding and Regina simply nodded.

“Do you know what a CT scan is?” Snow asked carefully.

“No,” Regina said simply, “only that the damn machine is expensive,” she recalled many a discussion with Whale during the cursed years about upgrading the machine. Eventually she had caved and allowed him to purchase a new one which she was now very grateful for.

“Okay, it’s completely painless,” Snow assured her quickly, “you lay on a table and a round machine will scan around your head. It will take around ten minutes, no one can be in the room with you at that time.”

Regina shifted uncomfortably and looked out of the window as she mumbled, “I see.”

“Before you have the scan you will need to either swallow a contrasting agent or have it injected into you,” Snow asked.

“Swallow,” Regina said quickly as she wanted to keep the medical staff away from her during the entire procedure and certainly didn’t want them to see her shaking hands.

“I thought as much, so that will be waiting for you,” Snow nodded, “you need to remove any jewellery or it will interfere with the scanner, anything metal needs to go.”

Regina reached up and started to remove her earrings and necklace as Snow continued, “when you’re in the scanner there will be an intercom into

the room next door where me and Doctor Whale will be so we'll be able to hear you and you'll be able to hear us."

Regina dropped her earrings, necklace and wristwatch into a compartment in the dashboard.

They pulled into the hospital car park and parked in one of the closest visitor bays and Snow looked at Regina who was beginning to pale and her hands were visibly shaking, "come on, Regina, let's get this over with quickly."

Chapter 46

Henry played with the cereal in the bowl with his spoon as Emma attempted to figure out how to turn on Regina's complicated and expensive looking coffee maker.

"So grandma is going to be mean to mom?" Henry asked with a frown.

"Kinda," Emma said as she pushed a button and a lid automatically opened, "when people are scared, different people need different things. Some people want to be held and told everything is going to be okay, some people wanna shake it off, some laugh, some people want to pretend they are fine... your mom, well, she wants to keep it together as much as she can and the best way she can do that is if your grandma is there."

Henry nodded, "that makes sense... what is the hospital going to do?"

Emma scooped Regina's fancy coffee into a panel, "she's going to have a CT scan it's like a..."

"Computed tomography," Henry nodded, "yeah, I know."

Emma turned and looked at him and he shrugged, "I watch a lot of House."

"Right, well, she's having one of them, it will let the doctor's see if there's any damage to her brain," Emma said casually, not wanting Henry to be too frightened of the prospect.

"Okay," Henry said equally casually, "when will the results be back?"

"Just a couple of hours," Emma said, "once she's had the scan Mary Margaret is bringing her back here and then we'll wait for the results."

"And if the scan doesn't show anything?" Henry asked as he chased another wheat loop of cereal around the bowl.

Emma didn't exactly have a plan for that eventuality so she just focused in getting the water into the coffee maker as she said, "well, we'll get to that when it happens."

"Because I think she doesn't have anything wrong with her brain," Henry said matter-of-factly.

"I'm sure you're right, either way she'll be fine," Emma glossed over the subject.

"Because she's not showing any permanent symptoms," Henry continued, "and I've been researching it and I think she has PTSD."

Emma quickly turned around and splashed some water on the floor as she did, "PTSD?"

"Yeah it's short for post-traumatic stress disorder," Henry explained.

"Yeah, I know that, Kid, why do you think your mom has that?" Emma asked with a frown.

"Because all of this started after what happened with Greg and she has all the symptoms," Henry explained as he looked sadly into his half-eaten cereal, "she has trouble sleeping and when she does she sometimes has nightmares, she admitted once that it was about what Greg did to her. And she avoids the town and hates going near the cannery, even talking about it seems to upset her, and that's called avoidance. And then there's the headaches and the stomach pains, lack of appetite."

"Where did you learn all this?" Emma asked him softly.

"Websites and stuff," Henry shrugged, still looking into his bowl as he played with the mushy remains, "it's been just me and Mom for a while."

Henry didn't mean anything by it but Emma keenly felt the guilt bubbling inside her, Henry and Regina had been dealing with this for months and Emma was just sweeping in now. If Mary Margaret hadn't worked late and

David gone to Henry's soccer match to kill time they would have never had dinner and Emma would still be clueless.

"I'm sorry, Henry," Emma said quietly.

Henry looked up in surprise, "don't be sorry, you're helping, Mom's better when you're around. Another reason why I think she's suffering with PTSD."

"What's the treatment for PTSD?" Emma felt a bit ridiculous asking her eleven-year-old son such a thing but clearly he'd spent time researching it.

"Cognitive behaviour therapy," Henry answered, "or anti-depressants but I don't think Mom will want them."

"She won't want therapy either," Emma pointed out.

"Yeah but she sent me to Archie for months and told me how good it was so she won't want to back down from that," Henry grinned.

Emma chuckled softly before her expression turned serious, "just... prepare yourself in case it's bad news," she said carefully.

Henry looked up at her and nodded, "I know," he looked back down at his cereal and continued to stir his spoon around the bowl.

Chapter 47

Regina stared up at the white plastic cover above her and listened to the various clicks and buzzes as the machinery inside whizzed around inside the casing. The moment of silence allowed her mind to start thinking about where she was and what was happening.

True to her word Snow had charged them through the hospital past countless doors and wards until they met a serious looking Victor Whale standing outside a door with a plastic cup of liquid. He thrust it into Regina's hand and she quickly drank the vile tasting concoction and he took the plastic cup from her and threw it into a nearby bin.

The three of them entered a sterile looking room with a plastic table and a large machine which Regina assumed was the much talked about CT scanner. Whale didn't touch her and seemed anxious to stand away from her as he verbalised where she should lay and quickly ran through the instructions that Snow had already told her during their walk up the corridor.

He hurriedly left the room and Snow walked over and looked down at Regina with an almost soft expression before she suddenly hardened and firmly said, "it will be ten minutes, we'll be right next door."

Regina wasn't sure she could do it, "can, can you stay?"

Snow's face froze in understanding at how difficult it must have been for Regina to ask that and warring emotions competed on her face, "I... I can't."

Regina eyes flicked to the poster on the wall stating that visitors must wear protective clothing and Snow sighed softly, "I didn't want to tell you like this... but... well, I'm pregnant."

Shock filled Regina's face and she stumbled for something to say but Snow saved her by continuing, "the X-rays are bad for the baby, otherwise I'd be right here," she promised.

“Then you must go,” Regina nodded her understanding and smiled as she felt Snow give her hand a small, comforting squeeze.

“Ten minutes,” Snow promised, “no longer.”

Regina heard the door close and started to control her breathing to prevent too much movement as Whale had told her.

She had no understanding of time as the machine continued to make noises and machinery seemed to float around her head covered by the white plastic. Occasionally Whale’s voice floated around the chamber asking her to confirm she was still okay which she replied with a barked attempt at a bored yes.

It seemed to be forever when Whale finally spoke and said they were done and to stay put while they got her out. She heard the door open and Whale looked down at her with a smile, “we got excellent shots,” he told her as he slid the bed out, “we’ll have results within the hour once the computer has finished compiling the images. Mary Margaret said to call her?”

Regina struggled to sit up and Whale held out an arm but didn’t physically touch her, she grabbed the arm and pulled herself into a sitting position and snatched her hand back before he could comment on her shaking hand.

“That’s right,” she said coldly and looked up to realise that Snow wasn’t in the room.

“She can’t come in here because of the residual background radiation,” Whale explained quietly as Regina slid off of the bed and he continued to hold out his hand in case she needed it.

Whale quickly walked around her and opened the door and she passed through it and towards the exit where she could see Snow waiting for her. She paused and looked at Whale, “thank you for your assistance,” she told him softly before quickly turning and walking away.

The two women silently walked through the hospital and towards the car, Snow regarded the other woman cautiously and could see that the pale skin

had not almost turned green and she wondered if she was going to be sick.

“Are you okay to go or do you need a minute?” Snow asked distractedly as she pretended to look for her keys in her bag.

“I want to go home,” Regina said quietly.

Snow quickly produced her keys and they drove in almost silence back to Mifflin Street until Snow spoke up, “Emma’s really worried about you, so when we get back I’m going to go and play that LEGO game with Henry in his room and I suggest you talk to her in private.”

Regina regarded Snow with a confused look but nodded as she tried to figure out whether she spoke the truth or if she was being incredibly kind and giving Regina some much needed privacy to fall apart when they got back.

As soon as they got to the front door it flew open and Henry and Emma stood there with worry etched on their faces, “come on, stop staring,” Snow shooed them into the house and shook her head, “okay, Henry, get that LEGO game ready, I’m going to be that P-O.”

“C-3PO,” Henry corrected and looked anxiously from Regina to Snow as Snow gave him a meaningful stare that prompted him to nod and run upstairs to turn on the game.

Snow turned around and looked at Regina, “we’ll hear within the hour and I’ll call you as soon as I know,” she looked at Emma, “I told her about how worried you are and your panic this morning so I suggest you two spend some time privately.”

Emma nodded her understanding, she hadn’t panicked but Snow clearly wanted to depart the scene to allow Regina some much needed time and space so she carefully took Regina’s arm and led her to the study.

As soon as they were in the study Emma closed the door and turned to ask Regina how it was but as she opened her mouth she saw Regina’s shoulders start to shake as tears quickly fell down her face. Emma stepped forward and

pulled Regina into a strong hug and Regina wrapped her arms around Emma's back as sobs wracked her body.

"I'm so proud of you," Emma said, "you did it."

They held each other tightly, the only sounds in the room were Regina's shaky breathing and the gently sounds of Emma comforting her.

Chapter 48

It was forty minutes later when Emma had finally managed to calm Regina down enough to go and get the brunette something to eat and something to drink from the kitchen. It had taken fifteen minutes before Emma had managed to shift them from their standing up position to coax Regina to sit on the sofa.

Regina had been shaking and gagged a couple of times as if she were going to be physically sick but both times she had swallowed it down and her headache was back at full power. Emma felt completely useless, she'd never been comforted as a child and certainly not as an adult so she didn't know what protocol to follow. The added layer of complication was that she was trying to comfort a former Evil Queen and someone who hated the idea of being perceived as weak.

But somehow Emma seemed to be doing well, she'd had Regina either laying her head in her lap or buried into her side as Emma cuddled her with an arm over Regina's shoulder. Regina spoke softly about it being over quickly and the experience itself not being terrible but the memories it brought back were the problem.

Emma had soothed and listened and done everything she could to calm Regina and there were periods where she wondered if she would ever manage it but slowly she managed it happened. She managed to get the brunette sitting up and after a while she was wiping her eyes with a tissue and before long she was fixing her hair and makeup in the mirror above the fireplace.

That was when Emma excused herself to the kitchen to get Regina something to eat and drink, she knew she'd struggle to do either but even a small bite would be a victory to Emma now. She'd also been anxiously clock-watching and listening out for any sounds that might indicate news had arrived but nothing had happened and now she stared at the tea cabinet wondering what would most likely entice Regina.

Upstairs Henry sat on a beanbag with his controller in his hand, “Grandma, can you get that door?”

Mary Margaret snapped out of her dream state and walked from her place on the edge of the bed towards the bedroom door. Henry looked at her in confusion, “the door in the game, you’re R2-D2, you have to open the doors, remember?”

Mary Margaret shook her head and sat back down and picked up the controller, “sorry, Henry, I’m just a little distracted with everything.”

Henry paused the game and turned around to regard his young grandmother, “she’ll be okay.”

As Mary Margaret opened her mouth to reply her mobile phone started to ring in her handbag and both of them stared at each other in stunned silence before she suddenly dived forward and threw half the contents of her bag on the floor.

Grabbing the phone and realising it was upside down and back to front she spun it around to answer it.

Back downstairs Emma was down to a choice of three teas and was still wondering why one person needed so many damn flavours of tea anyway, she was pretty sure some of them were made up.

Suddenly the noise of Henry running down the stairs taking them three at a time while shouting something that came out a garbled mess made her turn around in time to see a belated Mary Margaret also coming down the stairs.

Regina had clearly also heard the commotion and exited the study to see what was going on and was almost knocked over by Henry launching himself into her and holding her tightly.

“You’re okay,” he said quickly.

“I-I am?” Regina asked shakily as her eyes drifted to Mary Margaret who was holding her mobile phone in her hand as she got to the final step and

looked from Regina to Emma with a large smile.

“That was Whale, there is no trace of anything untoward, he said you have a perfect brain but I think he was sucking up,” Mary Margaret rolled her eyes.

Henry continued to hug his adoptive mother tightly and as Emma looked at them she realised he was probably all that was holding the brunette up. Regina stared at Mary Margaret in shock, “so, they... they found nothing.”

“In Whale’s own words,” Mary Margaret recited, “he cannot see any physical evidence of something that would cause your headaches.”

Regina looked relieved as she buried her head into Henry’s mop of messy hair.

Emma let out a breath she didn’t know she’d been holding and asked, “so, there’s nothing?”

Mary Margaret walked over to Emma and pulled her disorientated daughter into a hug and reassured her, “there is nothing, the scan was clear and he even double checked and got a second opinion. She’s clear.”

“So,” Regina looked up with confusion, “what’s causing the headaches?”

Mary Margaret took a deep breath, “I asked him that exact question and he said that now we have eliminated a physical cause we need to look at psychological causes.”

Regina swallowed, “he thinks I’m crazy?”

“No!” Mary Margaret said with a roll of her eyes as she stepped back from Emma and folded her arms sternly, “he thinks, as do we all, that you have been through a lot and that you don’t talk to anyone about it and that has an effect on people. Even you.”

“She’s right, Mom,” Henry said as he released his killer grip on her to look up at her face.

Regina looked from her son to her former mortal enemy and then to Emma, “what do you think?”

“Well,” Emma tucked her hair nervously behind her ear, “I think that it’s great news that Whale couldn’t see anything on the scan but it leaves us back at square one. If it’s not physical then we need to explore the next possible option, I think that means at least speaking to Archie.”

Regina raised a hand to her temple at the throbbing pain she found there and Emma continued, “but, for now we’ve had a really stressful day and I think we all need to take a break and step back and let it settle in.”

Mary Margaret nodded, “I agree, Henry asked if he could join me when I show Belle around the library to look at stock and stuff later, is that okay, Regina?”

Regina looked at the woman and slowly nodded, “yes, of course,” she whispered.

“Cool, thanks, Mom,” Henry said as he gave her an extra squeeze and ran upstairs to get his bag.

Once he was out of sight Regina licked her lips nervously, “thank you, Snow,” she said softly, “and congratulations.”

Emma looked at her mother in surprise and wondered why today of all days she had told Regina about her pregnancy but assumed she’d hear about that later.

“You’re quite welcome,” Mary Margaret said and seemed to consider something for a moment before quickly cross the hallway and pulling Regina into a quick embrace.

“I’m very pleased you’re okay,” she said as she pulled back with teary eyes and nodded to herself as she turned and left the house to wait for Henry in the car.

Regina watched her leave in surprise before looking at Emma hesitantly, “I presume you have...”

“...nothing to do and will be staying right here with you? Yes absolutely,” Emma grinned.

Regina blushed and smiled gratefully until Henry bounded down the stairs, “Henry! No running on the stairs!”

Henry slowed down and shook his head, “sorry, Mom,” he muttered though he grinned widely, “I’ll be home for dinner.”

He slammed the front door closed behind him and Regina and Emma were finally alone in the hallway. Emma held up her arms awkwardly, “hug?”

Regina chuckled, “you’re ridiculous,” she said as she walked into the hug.

Chapter 49

Apple and cinnamon seemed to be Regina's go-to flavour of tea and Emma made a mental note to remember that fact. They sat facing each other at the small dining table in the kitchen as Emma watched Regina eat and drink the smallest amount.

"A bit more," Emma said gently as she pushed the plate of plain crackers back towards Regina.

"I'm not hungry," Regina sighed but broke off the corner of a cracker and put it in her mouth regardless.

"You may not be hungry but your body needs the energy," Emma told her and poured a little more tea into the cup and saucer in front of Regina, "drink some more as well, you need fluids."

"Thank you, Doctor Swan," Regina quipped but there was a lightness in her tone.

"Someone needs to look after you," Emma shrugged, "you clearly won't look after yourself."

Regina didn't seem to want to argue that point and snapped another corner off of a cracker and slowly chewed it.

"I know we still don't know what's happening," Emma said carefully, "but it is good news that the scan came back with nothing."

Regina nodded distractedly.

"You don't think so?" Emma asked, desperate to get something out of the brunette.

Regina sighed, "in some ways, yes."

“And in other ways?” Emma asked.

Regina took a deep breath and swirled her tea in her saucer, “though I would never wish to step foot in that wretched building again... an explanation would have been nice. Something I can see, something that can be healed or removed. Now I just feel... broken... weak...”

“You’re not weak,” Emma said firmly, “you’ve been coping with this, alone, for weeks. Most people would have completely lost it by now.”

Regina didn’t react and simply sipped her tea before replying, “I suppose I’m just not certain of the way forward now, what am I supposed to do?”

Chapter 50

Emma sat at Regina's desk in her home study and ran her fingers along the edge of the desk in appreciation of its quality as she waited for Regina's laptop to boot up.

After all the excitement at the hospital, lack of sleep and lack of food Regina had started to look as weak as a kitten and almost keeled over as she started to unload the dishwasher. It was then that Emma firmly commanded that Regina go back to bed, the brunette hesitated and her dark chocolate eyes looked around the kitchen fearfully.

While Emma couldn't be sure what was worrying Regina, and she sure as hell knew that Regina wasn't in the mood to share anymore that day, she got the impression that the older woman didn't wish to be alone. After some tense negotiations Emma had sent Regina up to her bedroom to sleep with the promise that Emma would be in the house in case she was needed.

After Regina had pouted and headed off upstairs Emma finished cleaning the kitchen and emptying the dishwasher and smiled as she realised how comfortable she felt in the house these days. Putting crockery away she realised she knew where almost everything went as she had previously searched through all of the cupboards at one point or another over the last week. Aside from an egg slice and a lemon zester Emma found homes for everything in the dishwasher before making her way to the study.

The flickering light of the desktop coming to life shook Emma from her musings and she made a mental note to talk to Regina about computer security and the need for a password on her laptop. The background image on the desktop was one of Henry aged around five, he was dressed in a children's fireman outfit in the garden and held a small blue plastic watering can over some roses. Emma grinned at the thought that Regina had chosen that particular photograph to be greeted with each time she sat to work.

Emma pulled the heavy office chair closer to the desk and noticed the charity calendar was closed on the desk as if Regina had been looking at it or

adding dates to it. With a smile she opened the calendar to her own February picture and picked up a pen from the pen pot on the desk and wrote, ‘for personal recreation of this crime scene please call Sheriff Swan’ across the bottom of the photograph.

Closing the calendar and putting it to one side she pulled the laptop closer and opened up a browser window and paused with her hands over the keyboard for a few moments while she wondered what to type.

She eventually searched for PTSD and started to read about the disorder, at the bottom of the search results she saw a link to a test to diagnose the possibility of someone suffering from PTSD. She clicked on the link and flicked through the questions, without even answering the questions she could tell that Regina would answer yes to nearly all of them. Questions about suffering from trauma, feeling intense fear, distress, nightmares filled the screen and Emma sighed sadly as she began to understand how Regina was suffering even if she didn’t think she was.

Emma researched and read as much as she could cram into half an hour before she pulled out her mobile phone and called Archie Hopper. Archie quickly answered and Emma spoke to him about a hypothetical person who she believed might be suffering from PTSD and asked him for advice. The gentle man explained PTSD in much the same way that Emma had just read up on and providing information on different therapies and offered his services.

“Ah, to be honest I don’t think this person would be up for speaking to you, Archie, no offence,” Emma said quietly.

“Oh, no problem, Emma,” she could hear his smile down the phone, “your friend is very lucky to have you and I think if you can get your friend to talk about their issues, to let them out in the open, they would feel better.”

“This person isn’t necessarily that good at opening up,” Emma admitted.

“I understand,” Archie replied, “but if you remind them that sharing a tale, no matter how dark, can help lift the weight off of their shoulders then that

might well be a way in. It sounds like you are close to your friend and if you can get them to trust you then that will make it easier.”

“And you think that will help? Talking about it?” Emma clarified.

“Certainly, it will be a wonderful start,” Archie enthused, “one a patient can speak about the trauma freely it allows them to deal with the pain of what happened which in turn allows them to process it. All external stimuli enters our brain, gets processed and then filed away. Sometimes when stressful things happen our brain can’t process the event and it ends up on repeat. That can be compounded if the person has to be reminded of the event on a daily basis.”

Emma thought of the cuff and put her head in her hands and she muttered to Archie, “and if the person is being constantly reminded?”

“Well,” Archie paused, “it’s hard to say without knowing the specifics but if the person can be removed from that environment it would help. One of the things about therapy is that it is a safe place, usually away from the scene of the traumatic event.”

Emma looked up at the laptop as an idea popped into her mind, “thanks Archie,” Emma smiled, “you’ve been a great help!”

The man stuttered an uncertain goodbye, clearly having no idea what he had done to help and Emma hung up the phone and started searching online with a big grin on her face.

When Regina woke up and came downstairs a couple of hours later she followed the sound of Emma’s happy humming and walked into the study with a frown, “Emma?”

Emma looked up from the laptop with a smile, “hey! Are you feeling any better?”

“A small headache,” Regina admitted, “but otherwise well rested. What have you been up to?”

Emma could barely contain her excitement, “looking at vacations.”

“Oh,” Regina visibly deflated at the news, “where... erm, where are you thinking of visiting?”

Emma looked at Regina with a shake of the head, “we are going to Florida.”

“We?” Regina blinked in surprised confusion.

“Yes, well, you, me and Henry,” Emma supplied with a nod.

“Florida?” Regina asked in further confusion.

“Yup,” Emma nodded as she clicked a couple of buttons on the trackpad of the laptop.

“Not Tallahassee?” Regina hesitated.

“Nope,” Emma shook her head, “we’re going to St Petersburg, sun, sea, sand. And there’s an amazing stables nearby.”

Regina was still stood in the doorway and looked at Emma in utter confusion, “do I get any say in this?”

“Of course,” Emma said as she spun the laptop around to face Regina, “you get to choose between these two hotels.”

Chapter 51

Emma felt her stomach lurch and opened one eye curiously and looked to her left to check on her co-travellers. While the flight was only three hours it had been a little bumpier than she had expected but was pleased that Regina seemed to still be asleep in the middle chair of their row with Henry still looking out of the window with excitement.

Convincing Regina of a holiday had gone surprisingly well, especially once Henry was on board, right up until the mention of flying and that was when she flat out refused to go anywhere with either of them. Initially Emma had argued the point and said that she refused to drive for twenty four hours straight for a vacation but when that didn't seem to help Emma made herself scarce while Henry took the lead in reassuring his mother that flying was perfectly safe.

Eventually Regina agreed and even apologised for her outburst, it may have been in a tone so quiet that only dogs could hear it but Emma wasn't worried about small details like that.

So Emma, Regina and Henry sat down and planned the holiday together each choosing some activities they wanted to do and some sights they wanted to see. After browsing a number of hotel choices they found one that they all agreed was perfect and Emma booked everything and made all the plans and two days later they said goodbye to everyone as they left Storybrooke in the Bug to make their way to the airport.

Just before they got to the town line Emma stopped the Bug and gently took Regina's hand and pulled up her sleeve carefully to reveal the leather cuff. Henry pretended not to notice from the back seat as he continued to play his game and listened as Emma asked Regina to explain to her what she needed to do to remove it.

At first Regina was hesitant but eventually she guided Emma through the process of summoning her magic and imagining the cuff was removed. A few moments later a small white light sparkled over the leather material and it

fell open and Emma grabbed it with her free hand and threw it in the door pocket of the Bug with a smile. Regina rubbed her wrist gratefully and Emma put the Bug into gear and left the town.

Now they were two hours into a three hour flight and Henry hadn't been able to tear his eyes away from the window and watching different cloud formations as well as the ground racing along below him. Regina had fallen asleep quite quickly and Emma assumed that was testament to how little sleep the brunette had gotten recently. Emma sat on the end of the aisle with her headphones in, listening to music with her eyes closed as she mentally prepped the rest of the vacation.

Emma hadn't been on many vacations in her life, in the foster system vacations were very few and far between and after she got out of the system it had been a life of petty crime until she was in prison. But when she had gotten her life back on track and was earning good money in bailbonds work she had started to treat herself. Despite her pale skin Emma loved the beach and after the Maine weather she was looking forward to some heat on Florida's beaches and by the hotel pools.

The hotel had a great kids club which Henry seemed interested in which was good news as Emma knew that simply taking Regina on vacation was not going to be enough to help her with her issues. She'd spent a lot of time reading about different therapies and other ways to assist with PTSD and similar disorders and she knew it was important to get Regina to speak to her. Knowing it and doing it were different matters and Emma was hoping that being away from town would help Regina to relax and hopefully their fledgling relationship would help.

Emma also knew that, despite her growing wishes, she had to be on her absolute best behaviour during the vacation no matter what kind of temptations were unintentionally thrown at her by the brunette sleeping on her shoulder. Assisting with Regina's packing had exposed short skirts, short shorts and small bikinis that had instantly made Emma's mouth dry. She had booked two hotel rooms, each with two double beds and an interconnecting door between them which meant Henry could choose to split his time as he saw fit.

Emma had made it clear to Regina that while the vacation was indeed a vacation it was also an opportunity to discuss some things in a safe environment which would hopefully help the brunette to deal with her emotions. Regina hadn't immediately agreed to it but after Emma had explained to her how therapy was supposed to work and given her a choice between Emma and Archie she had soon come around. Regina had agreed to set aside time each day, preferably when Henry was occupied, to talk through things.

The plane lurched again and a few people ooo'd and ahh'd at the movement and Emma felt Regina stirring beside her so she paused the playback on her iPod.

“What’s happening?” Regina asked with a small hint of concern, still half asleep.

“Just the wind,” Emma said quietly and casually.

“I was asleep,” Regina grumbled tiredly.

Emma smiled, freshly woken Regina was grumpy and absolutely adorable she had only seen her like this twice before and enjoyed the usually composed woman in the confused state that directly followed her waking.

“Sorry,” Emma whispered.

“It woke me,” Regina reiterated.

“I know, close your eyes and go back to sleep,” Emma smiled as Regina’s confused eyes looked around the cabin.

“We’re flying,” Regina noted sleepily as she turned towards Henry and looked out of the window and shuddered, “I don’t like it.”

“I know,” Emma agreed, “just close your eyes and see if you can go back to sleep.”

Regina sighed to herself and lifted up the pathetically flat and small rectangle of cotton wool that passed as a pillow on the flight and placed it on

Emma's shoulder. She lay her head on the pillow and closed her eyes and within a few minutes Emma felt the weight of Regina's sleeping form.

Chapter 52

Emma loved her Bug but that love was being tested as she put her foot down on the gas pedal of the Ford Mustang convertible she had rented at the airport. While Regina had gone in search of a coffee shop to get herself a much needed injection of caffeine and Henry something made primarily of sugar and covered in chocolate Emma had been upsold.

Initially she was happy with the compact that she had booked online but when the rental agent pointed to the red and black convertible that had just been returned and was being offered at a great price Emma handed over her credit card without a second thought.

Henry had whooped with excitement and Regina had remained silent as Emma put their luggage in the, thankfully spacious, trunk. Regina handed Emma a coffee in a takeaway mug identical to hers and Emma smiled gratefully as she put on her aviator sunglasses and got into the powerful car.

Now cruising towards the hotel with the roof down and the sun shining Emma risked a glance to her front seat passenger and in the rear view mirror to check on Henry and decided that life probably didn't get much better. Once the enormous hotels started to dominate the scene Emma noticed that Regina was looking around in surprise as she took it all in.

Emma understood that Regina would never have seen anything like the crowded and bustling tourist destination even if it was in the off season. She was glad she had picked a reasonably large hotel of more than 200 room capacity so that Regina's open-mouthed staring would likely be unnoticed.

Finding the hotel and pulling into the car park Emma unloaded the bags and was grateful when a member of staff put the luggage onto a trolley and guided them into reception. The friendly check-in clerk took Emma's reservation number and started to type in details while Henry walked around the large marble lobby. Regina stood beside Emma in silence as she looked around in confusion as to what was going on.

The clerk read Emma's reservation details back to her and Emma confirmed they were all correct and reached into her back pocket to grab her wallet, a move that Regina understood and quickly produced her own bank card and handed it to Emma.

"It's fine," Emma shook her head.

"Excuse us," Regina said politely to the clerk and pulled Emma away from the desk to speak to her privately, "I can't have you pay for everything."

Emma shrugged, "I want to, I suggested it, I pay."

"Emma," Regina pulled her back again, "I want to pay."

Emma was a little uncomfortable discussing the money aspect of the trip because it was true that she didn't have endless funds and the trip was pretty much going to wipe out her savings account but that was her choice.

"Emma," Regina whispered to the uncooperative woman, "I have been Mayor for over twenty eight years and taking an average salary all that time, I have had hardly no outgoings and therefore it makes sense that I pay. Please."

Emma knew it made sense and she also knew that Regina wouldn't be able to understand her desire to pay as the brunette had never had to worry about money, "fine," she said as she snatched the card from Regina's hand and smiled at the clerk as she put it on the desk.

The check in process continued and the clerk helpfully provided a mountain of information regarding the three onsite restaurants and two pools as well as the kids club and the beach. Emma nodded in understanding and thanked her for her help and took the three plastic room keycards and turned towards the elevators.

"I hope that all made sense to you," Regina muttered, seemingly a little dazed by the whole experience.

"Yup," Emma smiled as the porter directed them towards their rooms and Henry ran over with excitement.

“The pool looks awesome!”

“Which one?” Emma grinned.

“Are we going to eat soon?” Henry asked as they got into the elevator and the porter selected the top floor.

“I highly recommend the beach restaurant,” the porter said with a helpful smile luckily unable to see Regina’s appalled expression that the help had deigned to speak to them about such matters.

“Cool,” Emma said politely, “but we’re exhausted so we might just stick to room service.”

The truth was that Emma was concerned about overwhelming Regina who had already been deathly quiet for the majority of the eight hour days’ worth of travel. She didn’t think that dragging the brunette down to a crowded restaurant on her first night would be a very good idea.

“There’s a movie in the pool area tonight,” the porter said with a nod of the head towards Henry, “starts at half past seven, tonight it’s Shrek.”

“Awesome,” Henry grinned.

“Yeah, have you ever watched a movie while being in a pool before?” the porter asked Henry with a smile and as Henry shook his head he continued, “it’s amazing, you can swim, watch a bit, swim, watch a bit. There are even speakers under the water so you can hear what’s happening up top!”

They walked to their rooms with the porter explaining to Henry all about the kids club and Emma hung behind a little with Regina who was looking at all the doors down the various corridors in confusion.

“You okay?” Emma asked softly.

“Yes,” Regina replied a little too quickly and then admitted, “I will feel more comfortable when we are settled into our rooms.”

“Okay,” the porter announced, “who is four ten and who is four eleven?”

Emma shrugged, “erm, Regina, you can be four ten,” she said as she took a keycard and opened the door.

Henry walked straight in, looking at the small hallway and then poking his head into the large bathroom with a smile and a nod before walking into the main room. In the room was a seating area with a couple of small sofas and a coffee table and then two large double beds both facing a large bench with a television and a desk. At the end of the room was a door leading onto a balcony and Henry ran over and opened the door and stepped out onto the balcony and looked down at the pool with a smile. Just beyond the pool was a small gardened area and then the beach and finally the crystal blue water of the sea.

Emma tipped the porter and thanked him for his time and when he left she approached a door opposite the beds and unlocked it and opened it. Regina frowned at her as she noticed that behind the door was another door.

“Be right back,” Emma said excitedly and left the room by the main entrance leaving Regina to look at the main door to the other door with confusion. A few moments later the door clicked and then opened and Emma stood in the doorway with a huge grin on her face, “always wanted to do that!”

She stepped through and picked up her bag and carried it back into her room, “come on in,” she called over her shoulder and Regina slowly followed her.

Emma’s room was identical to Regina’s but a mirror image and Regina looked at both rooms while maintaining the dazed expression she had adopted since arriving in Saint Petersburg. Emma did briefly wonder if she should have taken Regina somewhere a little quieter and less of a shock to the senses but figured that Regina would soon find her feet in the new surroundings.

“Are you hungry?” Emma asked as she picked up a black leather folder and opened it to look at the vast menu.

Regina looked around in confusion, “where do we cook?”

“We don’t,” Emma smiled, “we can go out to restaurants or we can have them bring it to us.”

“Ah, room service,” Regina nodded as if some puzzle piece was fitting together in her mind.

“Exactly,” Emma handed the menu to Regina, “let me know what you want and I’ll ring them and get them to bring it up. We can get changed and decide what to do with what is left of the day.”

“Mom!” Henry barrelled through the connecting door and then paused as he looked at the new room, “cool,” he noted before remembering his previous hurry, “Mom,” he looked at Regina, “can I watch the movie at the pool tonight?”

Regina opened her mouth and paused as she realised she didn’t really know what that was and therefore didn’t really know the correct answer.

Emma stepped in, “Henry, we’re going to order some food to eat in the room and then we’ll see what the time is and stuff, okay?”

Henry nodded, “sure, can I have a cheese burger?”

“Revolutionary,” Emma laughed, “sure you can, Kid, there should be a book somewhere with a list of hotel activities and stuff.”

Henry turned and hesitated for a moment, “er, which room am I in?”

Emma faltered, they hadn’t actually discussed that matter yet, “well, it’s up to you,” she said looking at Regina who simply nodded as if afraid to offer up a preference.

“Can I stay with you?” Henry said to Regina who was busy pretending to examine the menu and only looked up with the silence grew and she realised Emma hadn’t said anything.

“With me?” Regina clarified to Henry.

“Yeah,” Henry smiled, “at least at first, if I snore and annoy you then you can kick me out.”

Regina laughed and Emma smiled, “what makes you think I want you snoring in here?”

Henry shrugged, “then I’ll kick Mom out and she can sleep in here with you,” he said as he went back to Regina’s room to seek out the activity guide.

Emma decided to not comment and instead quickly turned to lift her bag up onto the luggage stand to start unpacking, it wasn’t until she looked up into the large wall mirror that she saw a matching blush on Regina’s cheeks as the brunette studied the menu.

Chapter 53

Meals were decided upon and Emma placed the order with the friendly room service operator and informed Regina and Henry that the food would be with them in around thirty minutes.

While Emma had been ordering food Henry had quickly gotten changed out of the clothes he had been travelling in all day and then asked Regina permission to go and have a look around the hotel. Regina seemed uncertain and hesitated for a moment before nodding her agreement but imploring Henry to keep his mobile with him and off of silence for once.

A while later Emma knocked on the still-open connection door to enter Regina's room, "hello?"

"I'm just in the bathroom getting changed," Regina's voice drifted into the main room and Emma paused. She wasn't entirely sure what to do with that information, did Regina mind her staying or would she expect her to go. Looking around for her safety net she frowned as she asked aloud, "Henry?"

"He's gone exploring," Regina supplied.

Emma nodded to herself, she couldn't blame him for that as it was his first proper holiday and if she were his age she certainly wouldn't want to be cooped up in the hotel room waiting for food.

Regina entered the main room and Emma noticed her change into a plain white t-shirt and forest green shorts with an appreciative smile. Regina seemed to take a moment to take in Emma's change into a light grey tank top and royal blue shorts with a smile of her own.

"He was itching to find where everything is," Regina continued regarding Henry, "he is very keen on this movie."

Emma nodded, "yeah, it's a nightly thing, kids club go so we can drop him with them or we can go too, if you want to watch Shrek?"

Regina frowned, “is that the green one?”

Emma nodded, “yeah, he’s an ogre who falls in love.”

Regina didn’t seem keen on the plot of the movie but hesitated. Emma considered it for a moment as she began to understand that Regina was nervous of her surroundings and therefore didn’t really want to let Henry out of her sight but then she didn’t want to deny the boy either.

“Come here,” Emma held out her hand and when Regina took it she pulled the brunette towards the open balcony door and onto the balcony itself.

Emma pointed down to the large pool area, “there’s the screen that they set up, so the kids can play in the pool while the movie is on. We can sit over there so we can keep an eye on Henry and watch if we want but if not we can just chat and drink cocktails.”

“Cocktails?” Regina laughed.

“Oh yes, cocktails is a very important part of vacations,” Emma said seriously.

“So, you’re not going to join Henry in the pool?” Regina questioned.

“No,” Emma shook her head, “I love the kid more than anything but that water will be cold and I’m too old to be going in the pool whatever the weather.”

“And he’ll be safe?” Regina quizzed as she looked at the pool with uncertainty.

“Sure, it’s not deep and there are lifeguards on duty and the kids club watchers will be there too,” Emma said as she pointed to the lifeguard stands and suddenly understood, “Regina, do you swim?”

Regina shook her head, “no.”

“Ah,” Emma said as understanding suddenly dawned on her.

“It wasn’t befitting of my status to learn to swim, that was for pirates,” Regina said with a smirk.

“But, who taught Henry?” Emma asked.

Regina hesitated a moment, “Graham,” she said quietly.

“Oh,” Emma felt her heart beating faster at the mention of the man’s name but attempted to keep the mood light, “well, he’s a strong swimmer so he’ll be fine. And even though I’m not planning to go in the water, if he gets into any trouble I’ll be in there like a flash.”

Regina looked up from the pool and out towards the sea with fascination, “it’s so blue.”

“Yeah, a bit different from home,” Emma said as she looked out at the twinkling sea and the sun starting to set in the distance.

“You think of Storybrooke as home?” Regina questioned lightly.

Emma considered that for a moment, “yes, I suppose I do, never really thought of it before. But my parents live there, my son lives there, you live there,” she shared a smile with Regina, “I don’t have my own place but I do consider it my home.”

“You don’t just feel obligated to stay, help stave off the next disaster?” Regina asked casually as she made a show of looking out into the distant sea.

Emma smiled to herself, “no, I stay because I want to, and will continue to stay.”

A knock on the door interrupted them and Emma went to let the room service cart into the room with Henry hot on its heels and Emma wondering if he had smelt the food’s arrival. They set the food up on the small table in the seating area of Regina’s room and Henry spoke of what he had found on his travels.

“I found both the pools and they have hot tubs out there too, one is for adults only, why is that?” Henry asked, sounding a little put-out.

Regina smiled, “yes, Emma, why is that?”

“No idea,” Emma looked at Regina with a grin, “probably so kids don’t hog the bubbles, what else did you find?”

“There’s a games room, an indoor pool and a spa, a gym...” Henry started listing.

“Where’s the gym?” Emma interrupted.

“Ground floor, next to the shop, there’s a corridor and it’s all down there,” Henry answered.

“You intend to go to the gym?” Regina asked with interest.

Emma nodded, “yeah, I love a proper fitness centre, I go running back home but this will help me work out other muscles.”

That caused a small flush of heat to appear on Regina’s cheeks and when Emma realised why she had embarrassed Regina she felt a similar heat in an altogether different place.

“Henry, we decided yes to the movie,” Regina quickly changed the subject.

“Awesome!” Henry started to bounce with excitement, “will you come in the pool with me, Emma?”

Emma shook her head as she swallowed some food, “sorry Kid, no way, it will be too cold for an old woman like me. We’ll be nearby though.”

“It won’t be cold,” Henry laughed, “we’re in Florida! The pool is heated too.”

“True,” Emma laughed, “while you’re in there you might be fine but when you get out you’ll be cold.”

Henry shrugged with disinterest at this information and Emma smiled at the arrogance of youth and knew full well that if their positions were reversed

she would be in that pool in an instant and to hell with the consequences.

Chapter 54

Emma picked up a handful of white hotel-issue towels from the large table by the entrance to the pool and laughed as Henry rushed towards the kid's club area in his bright red swimming shorts.

Regina looked like she was going to call after him and Emma just smiled at her, "he'll be fine, don't worry."

Emma led them over to a couple of sun loungers that were in view of the pool so Henry would see them but far enough away from the bar and the more obvious seating areas so they would be left alone. She laid out a few towels on each sun lounger and stacked the rest up on the table beside her for when Henry got out of the pool later. Picking up the bar menu she looked at the pictures of the colourful cocktails with a smile.

"Good evening ladies, here for the movie?"

Emma looked up at a young, blonde male waiter who quite possibly doubled as one of the muscular lifeguards who had been on duty earlier.

"Yes, our son is in the pool," Emma said, briefly wondering why she felt the need to immediately lay claim to Regina in such a way.

The waiter turned around just at the moment that Henry waved over to them, "ah, red shorts?"

"That's the one," Emma said with pride.

"I'll keep a special eye on him," he promised with a friendly smile, "in the meantime, can I get you ladies any drinks?"

"I'll have an apple juice," Regina said with disinterest as she regarded the sun lounger as if deciding how she would approach the contraption.

"One apple juice, and for you?"

“You are not having an apple juice,” Emma announced, “you’re having a cocktail. I’m not drinking alone.”

“You won’t be drinking alone, dear,” Regina said with a smile, “I’ll be drinking an apple juice.”

Emma looked like she wanted to argue the point but realised that Regina had just looked at the waiter and was regarding him with interest, “two apple juices,” Emma said quickly and slammed the drinks menu shut.

The waiter nodded, “coming right up,” he announced with a smile as he quickly left. Regina watched him walk by and looked him up and down appreciatively.

“Regina!” Emma hissed.

“Hmm?” Regina said without turning around.

“Regina, do you mind not staring at the waiter’s butt?” Emma sighed.

“What should I stare at?” Regina laughed as she turned around to see Emma pouting, “oh, come now, I have never seen a man with such a physique in such tight clothing. I’m allowed to look, surely?”

Emma sat heavily on her sun lounger and ignored the brunette, “yeah, sure, whatever.”

Regina rolled her eyes, “if you had eyes in the back of your head you would have seen me looking at you in exactly the same way on the way to the pool.”

Emma looked up at Regina in surprise, “r-really?”

“Of course,” Regina smiled as she sat on the edge of her own sun lounger, “I appreciate beautiful things.”

Emma chuckled, “on one hand I’m happy that you think I’m beautiful, on the other hand I’m a little pissed that you’re comparing me to a waiter’s butt.”

Regina looked a little contrite, “I’m sorry,” she said slightly offhandedly, “I’m not used to there being quite this much flesh on display, it certainly wasn’t this way back home and Maine is too cold.”

Emma laid stiffly on the sun lounger with her arms folded as she watched Henry splashing in the pool happily.

“Are you angry with me?” Regina quizzed with a frown.

“A little,” Emma admitted with a grumble.

Regina opened her mouth to speak but paused as she considered her actions, it had been a long time since she had been in a relationship and this was different to any relationship she had ever been in. She regarded Emma curiously as the blonde sat grumpily and attempted to ignore the brunette and she began to put the pieces together.

“I’m sorry,” she tried again, this time with more feeling as she started to understand how her actions had upset the blonde, “of course that was wrong of me, I won’t look at him, or anyone else, like that again.”

Emma glanced sideways at Regina and slowly nodded and Regina knew that although she hadn’t fully repaired the damage she had gone a long way in demonstrating to Emma that she had reflected upon her actions and was at least trying to fix them.

“So,” Regina said as she stretched out on her own sun lounger, “this ogre falls in love?”

“Yeah,” Emma nodded at the waiter as he returned with their drinks, “happy endings and all that.”

“How quaint,” Regina said as the waiter left them in peace.

“What do you think of Florida so far?” Emma asked as she watched the movie in the distance, not concerned that she couldn’t make out the speech.

“Overwhelming,” Regina admitted, “but generally very peaceful and nice.”

“I’m glad you like it, I wanted it to be somewhere you could feel relaxed,” Emma said softly.

“I believe I will, once the initial shock has worn off,” Regina replied with a grin.

They sat in silence for a while each watching the animated movie and the children in the pool who were fluctuating between swimming and bobbing around in the water giggling at the movie.

“Thank you,” Regina said suddenly, breaking the silence.

“What for?” Emma said without taking her eyes off the pool.

“For doing all of this,” Regina explained, “researching a vacation and planning and organising everything, Henry is having a wonderful time and... I’m very grateful.”

The waiter walked by and nodded happily at the two women and Emma bristled a little and Regina chuckled, “he’s only being polite, dear.”

Emma swallowed and stared at the pool again as if refusing to make eye contact and Regina frowned, “Emma, what is it?”

“I’m just thinking I’ve probably shot myself in the foot,” Emma muttered.

Regina waited for Emma to clarify but when nothing was forthcoming she sighed, “explain?”

Emma took a deep breath to prepare herself for the embarrassing conversation ahead, “in Storybrooke you... you are kinda surrounded by people you hate.”

Regina considered this, “I suppose you could say that.”

“So, I kinda felt I had a chance, you know, there’s not a lot of fish in the sea,” Emma said, “but now we’re here and there’s... people... better people. Waiters with amazing abs and... and I brought you here and...”

“Emma,” Regina tried to stop the blonde’s rising panic.

“I’m a dirt poor orphan,” Emma turned towards Regina and the older woman noticed that tears were beginning to form, “I’m clumsy, I’m not going to win a prize for my intellect, I’m a screw up when it comes to emotions and relationships, the only good thing I ever did was give birth to Henry and I gave him up because I was in prison when I was pregnant with him!”

“Emma,” Regina said again as she sat up and reached a hand towards her.

Emma pulled her knees to her chest and hugged her arms around them, “you’re a Queen, Regina, a fucking Queen. What the hell do you want with someone like me?”

Regina stood up and sat by Emma’s bare feet on her sun lounger and looked sincerely at the blonde, “Emma, please listen to me.”

Emma sniffed and looked over her kneecaps at the brunette and silently allowed her to continue.

“I am not simply with you because you are the best of a bad bunch, that is entirely ridiculous,” Regina said seriously, “I’m not going to run off with some waiter or in fact anyone so you can put your mind at rest, I am here with you because I want to be here with you. What I said to you in Storybrooke still stands in Florida, I care about you... a great deal as it turns out but I’m still processing that information myself.”

Emma’s lip wobbled as she attempted to smile at Regina’s admission and Regina smiled, “and I may be a Queen but you my dear are the Saviour, the product of True Love, a Princess and, most of all, a beautiful and loving woman and mother,” she reached out with her hands and started to thumb Emma’s tears away, “where did all this come from?”

Emma shrugged, “tired from the travel I guess?”

“Hmm,” Regina said disbelievingly.

Emma sighed before quietly uttering, “I’ve... I’ve kinda got low self-esteem.”

“It seems that this vacation has come at the right time,” Regina smiled, “Emma, you are an extraordinary woman, one who I am very much enjoying the company of.”

Emma wiped at her tears with embarrassment, “I’m sorry, I don’t know where all that came from.”

“It’s been an emotional few days,” Regina smiled as she glanced over to Henry to check he was okay.

“We’re meant to be here for you and I go and start blubbing,” Emma said sadly.

“I don’t have the monopoly on grief,” Regina said as she watched Henry diving under the water, “we all have our issues,” she turned to face Emma, “it’s about having someone to sort through them with.”

Emma reached forward and intertwined her hand with Regina’s, “thank you,” the blonde smile softly.

Regina squeezed the hand lightly, “maybe we should order some cocktails after all?”

Chapter 55

An hour and two cocktails later and Emma and Regina were both laying on their respective sun loungers talking whilst occasionally laughing at the movie.

“I’m considering moving out of the apartment,” Emma announced.

“Oh?” Regina raised an eyebrow.

“Yeah, it’s a bit cramped these days and with...” she paused.

“With the baby on the way?” Regina finished.

“Exactly,” Emma mentally kicked herself for what might be a sensitive subject for Regina.

“You’re quite right,” Regina said as she stabbed a piece of orange with end of the umbrella in her drink and fished it out of the glass, “having a newborn in the house will be hard work.”

“Exactly, which makes me feel worse,” Emma sighed.

Regina frowned, “what do you mean?”

“I feel guilty,” Emma explained, “Mary Margaret is having a baby and I feel like I should be there and should help her... but I just wanna get away from it all, you know?”

Regina shook her head in confusion, “I’ll never understand your enormous capacity for misplaced guilt. It’s not your baby, you didn’t decide to have another child and I’m sure you weren’t included in any discussions about a new baby joining the family. Your mother’s choice to have a new baby shouldn’t have any bearing on your own life.”

Emma nodded, “yeah, I suppose.”

Regina looked sideways at Emma, “unless it isn’t guilt that you are feeling?”

“What do you mean?” Emma asked quickly.

“Well, maybe it’s not guilt, maybe it’s anger?” Regina questioned lightly.

Emma laughed, “I’m not angry at my mother having another baby, it’s perfectly natural.”

“Maybe anger is too strong a word, maybe... bitter?” Regina asked gently.

Emma looked at the brunette with an unreadable expression and after a while inclined her head, “maybe,” she admitted.

“Emma,” Regina started.

“Mom!” Henry cried out as he approached them, looking frozen cold as droplets of water dripped down his goose bumped flesh.

“Oh, Henry,” Regina was on her feet immediately and grabbed a towel and unfolded it to place it on his head and then grabbed another to wrap it around his shoulders.

“It’s freezing,” Henry shivered and Emma looked at him with a knowing grin.

Regina sat on her sun lounger and pulled Henry to sit on her lap and wrapped her arms around the towel clad boy in an attempt to warm him, he leaned into the embrace and his cold face touched Regina’s and she shivered herself, “we should get you inside and warmed up.”

“Er,” Emma sat up a little, “it’s air conditioned in there, he’ll feel much colder. Should probably try to dry off a little out here first.”

“It was awesome,” Henry said in between shivers, “you can hear the movie under the water and I spoke to one of the activity directors and she said they are going to have a painting lesson tomorrow morning, can I go? Please, Mom.”

He craned his head to look at Regina who was holding him tightly while rubbing his back and arms through the towel in order to dry and warm him, “of course,” she said and Emma thought that Henry could have asked for anything in that moment.

Henry animated told Emma about the film and the pool and Emma smiled and nodded as she listened but she also watched as Regina hugged him tightly to her as she warred with her emotions. It was clear that she was happy that Henry had enjoyed himself but she was also frightened that he had returned shivering and being his mother she hated to see him in discomfort.

“Sounds really cool,” Emma said as she stood up, “but let’s get you back to the hotel room and into a hot shower.”

Henry nodded and slid off of Regina’s lap and started to make his way towards the entrance of the hotel.

“You okay?” Emma asked as she held out a hand to assist Regina to her feet.

“Yes,” Regina said distractedly as she followed him, “it just reminded me of when he was a child and he needed me to take care of him following a scrape or a bruise.”

“He’s growing fast,” Emma commented.

“Yes he is, it’s nice when I get a glimpse of what it used to be like,” Regina said, “he suddenly grew up and became independent and then... well...”

“I came along,” Emma completed.

“I lost some valuable time,” Regina said, not apportioning blame but stating the truth, “and I’m glad he is back but there are times I wish he were five again.”

“Why five?” Emma smiled.

Regina smiled brightly, “when he was five he was... wonderful,” she breathed.

At that moment Henry walked through the automatic doors into the hotel and ran back out again, “it’s freezing in there!”

“Told ya so,” Emma laughed.

The three of them took a deep breath and ran into the hotel, the two women laughing at Henry as he jumped around while huddled in his towels in an effort to keep warm. In the elevator he buried himself in an embrace with Regina again and she handed him the room keycard. As soon as the elevator doors opened he ran down the corridor towards the room and Emma and Regina just laughed at the sight.

The room was a fair way from the elevators and they casually walked up the first corridor as Emma spoke up, “I am bitter,” she said simply.

Regina was perplexed for a moment until she nodded in understanding, “about the child?”

Emma nodded, “I know I’m not but I feel like I’m being replaced.”

Regina nodded again, “it’s easy to see why you would feel that way.”

“Not to Mary Margaret and David,” Emma laughed, “they think I should be happy to be getting a baby brother or baby sister. It hasn’t even occurred to them that I might want to move out, have my own space. I... I just feel selfish for feeling this way.”

“Emma,” Regina let out a small sigh, “you... we haven’t exactly spoken about your childhood but I don’t imagine that it was all happy families and fairy tales. Life in the foster system can’t have been kind and it’s only natural that now you have found your parents you want to spend some time getting to know them and having them to yourself. A new baby... well, I’m sure if they thought about it they would understand your feelings.”

“But they don’t,” Emma said quickly, “they just expect everything to be perfect all the damn time, like they can’t even imagine why I might not be happy now we’re all together.”

“They are Snow White and Prince Charming,” Regina said with a smirk, “what do you expect?”

Anything Emma was going to say was interrupted by a hotel room door opening and a couple stumbling out whilst lip-locked in a passionate kiss. The man was grabbing the female possessively and the female was chuckling into the intense kiss and neither of them noticed or cared about Emma and Regina passing them.

Regina stared open-mouthed at the blasé show as they rounded the corner and Emma laughed at Regina’s shock, “bet you didn’t see that every day in the Enchanted Forest.”

“Certainly not,” Regina shook her head, “Florida is a strange place.”

“Oh that’s not confined to Florida, that’s more a hotel thing,” Emma admitted.

Regina looked at Emma in alarm and Emma quickly added, “not that I brought you here for... I mean... not everyone in a hotel... I... I’m going to shut up now.”

They stopped outside Regina’s door and she sighed, “I gave Henry my key.”

“Come into mine,” Emma said as she took her own keycard out of her pocket and opened the room door, Regina followed her in with uncertainty.

“Can I get you a drink?” Emma said as she switched the lights on.

“Erm, well, no, I think I’ve had enough,” Regina said as she eyed the interconnecting door and her means of escape.

“I didn’t mean an alcoholic drink,” Emma said, “I have tea, or decaf coffee? Juice?”

Regina hesitated a moment and Emma opened the interconnecting door and then the other door and called out, “Henry, you okay?”

“Yeah, I’m in the shower,” he called back loudly over the sound of running water.

“Okay, we’ll be in my room,” Emma said and stepped back in and looked at Regina, “he’s fine.”

Regina nodded, “I suppose I could take some tea,” she admitted as she sat on the sofa in the living area and watched Emma filling a small kettle.

“Is apple and cinnamon okay?” Emma asked.

Regina frowned, “they have that here?”

“No, I brought some with me,” Emma admitted with a small blush.

Regina smiled kindly, “that would be lovely.”

Chapter 56

Emma lay in the dark and in the middle of the large, soft bed with a big smile on her face as she thought about the day. The travel, the hotel, the movie had all been wonderful because she was with Regina and Henry, Henry was having a great time and was almost vibrating with excitement and Regina was softening more and more each moment they spent together.

They had spent an hour drinking tea on Emma's sofa while looking at the hotel guide and talking about activities and outings and things they might want to do and things that Henry might want to do. Henry came into the room in his new Harry Potter pyjamas that Regina had got for him and she smiled as she commented that it was nice to see him in trousers they didn't display his shins.

He gave both of his mom's a hug and yawned as he said goodnight and went back into Regina's room. Regina stayed a while longer, seemingly not wanting to leave as she re-read some of the activity sheets. Emma said that she planned on going to the gym the next morning and Regina ruffled her nose at the thought and said she didn't consider such a thing as a vacation activity.

It was decided that Regina would take Henry to breakfast in the morning and then maybe join him for his painting lesson. It was also decided that they would leave the interconnecting doors closed but unlocked so they had some privacy and when Regina made her way to her room she paused briefly and pressed a soft kiss to Emma's cheek, "thank you for everything," she said as she walked into her room closing the door behind her with a smile.

Emma had waited a second before performing her, now mandatory fist-pump, and spent the next hour getting ready for bed and unpacking whilst smiling like a fool. She lay in bed reflecting on her mini-meltdown and how Regina had said exactly the right things to make her feel better, she'd called her beautiful and loving and said that she had feelings for her that she was still processing. While Emma didn't exactly know what that meant it still

gave her a warm glow and the hope that the relationship would grow into something more.

But she knew she had to take things slowly and gently with Regina who already seemed to be completely overwhelmed in the real world and outside of the protective bubble of Storybrooke.

A shout from the next room followed quickly by another had Emma out of her bed and through the interconnecting doors before she had a chance to think and she found herself in the darkened bedroom with her heart racing.

Dim light flooded the room as Regina sat up in bed and turned on a bedside lamp and both women looked at the other bed where Henry was thrashing around cursed by a nightmare. Emma breathed a sigh of relief that they were both safe and well as her first thought had been straight out of a horror movie.

Regina quickly slid out of bed and sat on Henry's bed and stroked his hair softly and whispered his name gently over and over. Without waking he settled and visibly relaxed as the nightmare vanished. Regina looked up at Emma while she continued soothingly combing her fingers through his hair, "he occasionally has these nightmares," she whispered to Emma.

Emma suddenly felt a wave of guilt that she had no idea that this was a frequent occurrence and she swallowed as she recognised how quickly Regina had reacted and calmed Henry with nothing more than a soft touch and some gentle words. When Henry had been living in the Charming apartment he had experienced some nightmares but Emma had always put it down to the stressful time and discovering that his mother has been the Evil Queen. But the fact that they were still happening was news to Emma.

"Has he had them for long?" Emma asked quietly as her eyes flicked from Henry to Regina.

"Since he was a toddler," Regina answered, "Doctor Hopper said that it was perfectly natural for children with a heightened sense of imagination. They are less frequent nowadays."

“How frequent?” Emma asked with a frown.

“Maybe one or two a week,” Regina said, “I think all of the excitement today has probably contributed.”

Emma paled as she feared that her actions in taking Henry on vacation and exposing him to all the new sights, sounds and experiences might have caused the nightmare.

“He’s perfectly fine,” Regina assured, “he will hardly remember it if at all when he wakes up, the trick is to soothe away the dreams without waking him,” she turned and smiled at Henry’s sleeping form, “I’m sorry if he woke you.”

“I was awake,” Emma swallowed thickly, “I... I was worried something had happened to one of you.”

“Well, Saviour,” Regina grinned in jest, “as you can see, we’re fine, get some rest or you’ll fall asleep at the gym.”

Emma nodded and made her way back to the door, “night,” she whispered before she quietly closed both of the interconnecting doors behind her. She climbed back into bed and began to think, not for the first time, what a wonderful mother Regina was and how badly she wished she could have been there for Henry throughout his entire life rather than arriving so late.

Eventually sleep claimed Emma and she had restless dreams about her family and being alone, she recalled foster homes she would have rather forgotten about and by the time she awoke the next morning she was tired, grumpy and very tense.

She quickly put on her exercise clothes and looked at her mobile phone to see a text from Henry with a photograph of the breakfast buffet where he was currently dining with Regina. She laughed and replied to say she was on her way to the gym and would catch up with him later and to enjoy his painting lesson.

The gym was amazing and Emma worked out hard, putting all the machines to good use and working on both cardio and strength but she found that her shoulders were still tight from the terrible night's sleep. One of the instructors passed as Emma was massaging her own shoulder to rid herself of a particularly bad muscle knot.

“Hey, you okay?”

Emma looked up at the young woman and smiled, “yeah, just a muscle knot.”

“You should get a massage, spa is right next door,” she smiled, “they’ll work that out for you in no time.”

Emma eyed the door and then nodded, “you’re right, thanks!”

She picked up her gym bag and walked into the spa area and saw a friendly woman on the reception desk, “hi, I know this is real short notice but I was wondering if anyone was available for a back and shoulder massage, I’ve got a muscle knot and it’s really uncomfortable.”

The receptionist winced in sympathy, “let me have a look for you,” she clicked the computer mouse a couple of times, “we’re booked up here in the spa but we’ve had a cancellation for the mobile service.”

“What’s that?” Emma asked as she tilted her head from side to side to lessen the muscle pain.

“Massage in your room, they have a foldaway table and come to you, someone cancelled so we could go to your room and do it now if you like?”

“That would be amazing,” Emma smiled, “I’m in four eleven.”

Meanwhile Regina sat at an easel looking at the canvas in front of her with disdain. She’d always hated art but had always desperately wanted to be good at it but now she was at the lesson she was sighing as nothing seemed to be going as she pictured it in her head.

She looked at Henry in the hope that he was also fed up and they could leave but he seemed completely invested in what he was doing so she scrunched up her face and looked out of the window at the pool area.

“You don’t have to stay if you don’t want to,” Henry said.

“Oh, I don’t want to leave you on your own,” Regina smiled at him kindly.

“I’ll be fine, I know you hate painting,” Henry laughed.

“I don’t hate painting, I hate being bad at painting,” Regina corrected and sighed as she looked out of the window again, “are you sure you wouldn’t mind if I leave? I was thinking of sitting by the pool with a book. You can join me when you’re done?”

“Sure,” Henry nodded, “I have my phone if you need me.”

Regina didn’t need much more convincing and quickly stood up and gave him a kiss on the cheek as she left the class. She looked at her watch and wondered if Emma would have finished at the gym and would like to join her by the pool.

She quickly dialled Emma’s mobile number and pressed the phone to her ear as she made her way back to her hotel room to pick up her book and some sun lotion. The call eventually went to voicemail and Regina hung up deciding that Emma was still at the gym.

She bit her lip and smiled as an image of Emma crossed through her mind, sweating as she worked out on some kind of weights machine. She shook her head to remove the image as she opened her door and started collecting things she would need while down by the pool.

Then she heard a noise from Emma’s room. She frowned and stood still as she listened intently and when she didn’t hear anything she crossed closer to the interconnecting door and listened again.

She jumped back in surprise as she heard a moan. A moan of pleasure. Followed by another and then she clearly heard Emma’s voice, “yes, right

there, you are a Goddess!"

Regina dropped her book to the floor in shock as she stared at the door with her mouth open.

Chapter 57

Regina stared at the door, her mouth open, her pulse racing. She could definitely hear Emma expressing sounds of pleasure and she couldn't fathom a reason for it other than the obvious. Emma was in her room with another woman. Emma had waited for Regina to be with their son at a ridiculous painting lesson to bring some woman into her room.

Regina's eyes narrowed and she started to seethe in anger. Her initial instinct had been to pick up her book and run, to escape the awkward situation and the taunting sounds of Emma's pleasure. But then Regina's alter ego began to surface and jealously ripped through Regina quickly as her mind unhelpfully conjured images of Emma in the throes of passion with some leggy bimbo.

Regina opened her side of the interconnecting door with such a force she would later wonder how it stayed on its hinges before bursting through the other door. Her eyes widened as she looked at both double beds, both empty. A deep moan of pleasure caused her to look to the side where she saw Emma laying on a mobile table with a very short, very old Chinese lady who was standing on a stool of all things while massaging Emma's back and shoulders.

"Hey, Regina," Emma called out even though her head was immobile with her face pressed into some hole in the table, she'd clearly heard the brunette enter, "this is Ling, she's amazing!"

Ling looked up briefly and smiled warmly at Regina, clearly not reading the receding rage on the brunette's face.

"I had a... oh, yeah, there... a really bad muscle knot," Emma explained, "and they... oh, that's amazing, don't stop, they do a mobile massage, cool eh?"

Regina blinked for a second as she stepped down from the murderous rage she had been in, "very, I'll leave you to it," she said as she tore her eyes away from the glistening shine of Emma's naked back.

“We’ll only be another couple of minutes,” Emma said and then let out a deep moan as Ling pressed down hard on a sensitive spot.

“I’ll be in my room,” Regina said huskily as she quickly left the room and closed her door. She began pacing as comprehension started to dawn on her, she had been furious at the very thought of Emma with another woman. She hadn’t realised how much ownership she felt towards Emma and she sat on the edge of Henry’s bed as she started to consider that.

She had been ready to burst into the room and tear the slut off of her girlfriend, which was exactly how she had interpreted the scenario in her mind in the seconds before she entered the room. She wondered how long she had considered Emma as her girlfriend and wondered about the strong flash of jealousy that had coursed through her.

She took a few deep breaths to calm herself as she thought about her relationship with Emma, she had been happy setting a slow pace but now she wondered if her pace were too slow would Emma look elsewhere. Suddenly she wondered why she was setting a slow pace at all, hearing the noises Emma had been making had instantly caused a heat between Regina’s legs.

The second the jealousy had faded she found it to be replaced with lust and desire, the fear of losing Emma had hit her like a brick wall and now she was left with a need to cement their relationship. She needed to show Emma what she meant to her and she needed to claim the blonde for her own.

The sound of movement from next door indicated that the masseuse was leaving and Regina quickly got up and off of the bed as she flung the interconnecting door open again and stalked into Emma’s room.

She was just in time to see Ling leaving and Emma closing the door behind the masseuse and Regina’s legs moved towards the blonde quickly, before she had too much time to think or her brain told her what a bad idea it all was.

As Emma flipped the lock and turned around she was surprised to see Regina approaching her and more surprised when Regina pushed her up against the solid wood of the door with her body and kissed her fiercely.

Emma tried to speak but the sound was immediately muffled in a passionate, open-mouthed kiss as Regina grabbed her by her upper arms and held her firmly in position. The words turned into a moan which only seemed to urge Regina on as she pressed her body up against Emma's and kissed Emma senseless.

Coming to her senses Emma gently pushed Regina back and stopped responding to the kiss so the brunette would pause her fervent onslaught.

“Regina?” Emma questioned breathlessly.

Regina wasn’t in any mood to speak and stepped back and grabbed Emma by the upper arm and dragged her towards the nearest soft surface which happened to be the sofa and flung Emma onto it.

Emma fell onto her back and was about to speak again when Regina was suddenly on top of her, settling her body in-between Emma’s open legs and silencing her with further enthusiastic kisses as one hand tangled in blonde locks and the other started to undo the buttons on her own short sleeved shirt.

Emma grabbed Regina’s hand to stop it from unbuttoning the brunette’s shirt and pulled her lips away, “Regina? What’s going on?”

Realising that Emma wasn’t going to just lie there and be ravished without some form of explanation Regina hissed, “I want you. Now.”

Emma swallowed, “w-why now?”

“Do you want this or not?” Regina griped.

Emma closed her eyes and took a couple of deep breaths before she shuffled herself away from Regina, “not. Not now, not until I get an explanation of what the hell is going on.”

Anger flashed through Regina’s eyes and she stood up to leave the room but Emma quickly got to her feet and grabbed the brunette and spun her around, “dammit Regina, talk to me!”

“I was jealous!” Regina thundered back.

“What?” Emma frowned in confusion.

“I heard you,” Regina said, anger still raging through her, “moaning and saying that someone was a Goddess, I thought you were with someone!”

It quickly started to fall into place for Emma and she nodded, “the massage...”

“I was jealous, I was going to throw them out and have you for myself,” Regina pulled her arm out of Emma’s grip and stared at her furiously, “it made me realise...” she took a deep breath as she started to calm down, “it made me realise that I wanted you. That I’ve wanted you for some time and that I need to take the initiative. But clearly you don’t feel as I do.”

She started to turn and Emma grabbed her and spun her around again, “I do, I do feel as you do,” Emma said ardently, “I want you so badly but I don’t want to mess this up. I don’t want to fall into bed with you just because you heard me enjoying a massage, I want it to be right.”

“Mom?”

Both women looked up as they heard Henry enter Regina’s room.

“And I want to do it when we’re not about to be interrupted by our son,” Emma whispered as Regina hurriedly did up the buttons on her shirt and fluffed her hair.

“In here, Henry,” Emma called.

Henry came into the room a moment later with a painting, “look what I did!”

He held out a painting of the beach and the sea which he had obviously spent a lot of time on as each wave of the sea had been made to look like it was reflecting small beams of light.

“Henry, that’s wonderful,” Regina smiled as she looked at the painting, “you are very talented.”

“That’s awesome, Henry,” Emma grinned.

“Can we go to the beach?” Henry asked, “I know you wanted to sit by the pool but you can sit by the beach, I wanna go in the sea.”

Regina nodded, “okay, but only if Emma is with you when you’re in the water.”

Henry looked hopefully at Emma and she nodded, “sure, sounds like fun, go and get into your trunks and make sure you put a lot of sun lotion on, okay?”

Henry happily scampered into the other room to get changed and Emma pulled Regina into a chaste kiss, “I want you,” she said seriously, “whenever you are ready and the time is right. You don’t need to be jealous, you are all I want and I’m willing to wait as long as you need until you feel right.”

“I feel right now,” Regina implored as she wrapped her arms loosely around the blonde.

Emma shook her head, “you’re overwhelmed with being out of Storybrooke, we’re suddenly here and everything’s different and we’re different and then you get blindsided by jealousy... chill out at the beach and let the dust settle and see how you feel then.”

Regina looked at Emma in bewilderment before smiling and nodding and when she leaned in to kiss the blonde it was soft and filled with promise rather than the hungry desperation from moments before.

“Mom, where’s my... ew, never mind,” Henry said as he popped his head around the corner and then ruffled his nose at the sight of the women sharing a kiss.

Chapter 58

Emma decided that she hated vacations. She hated hotels. She hated beaches. She hated Florida. She decided that going on this particular vacation was quite possibly her worst ever idea and that really set a high bar.

Because now she found herself on a private hotel-owned beach with her son who was dying to get into the water as soon as possible which meant that she would have to somehow pull her eyes away from Regina. They had all decided to wear their swimwear under their clothes as they walked the short distance from the hotel to the beach. Henry decided on the perfect location and he and Emma set up three sun loungers near and put their bags down.

Henry quickly pulled off his shorts, shoes and t-shirt and was already making his way towards the water when Emma looked up to see Regina removing her t-shirt to reveal a black bikini top with thin straps. Emma's mind quickly flashed back to the passionate kisses exchanged in her hotel room and how she had somehow managed to stop Regina by a strength of will power she didn't even know she had. Now she looked at Regina slowly shimmying out of her shorts to reveal a pair of matching black bikini bottoms and Emma realised she had forgotten to breath and quickly took a few fast breaths to stave off the lightheaded feeling.

"Come on, Emma," Henry called out as he started to enter the water.

Regina folded her clothes and packed them away in a bag as she got her book out and stretched out on the sun lounger. Emma looked over towards Henry, "just a second, Kid."

Regina looked up at Henry and asked Emma, "will he be okay on his own?"

Emma quickly stripped out of her clothes to reveal her tight red swimming costume, "yeah, he'll be fine, there's no waves at the moment."

Regina glanced over at Emma and took a deep breath and smiled as she looked the blonde up and down appreciatively.

“Wanna join us?” Emma asked.

“No,” Regina said definitively as she opened her book.

“Well if it gets to hot and you need to cool down,” Emma said with a shrug as she walked towards the shoreline with a Frisbee in her hand.

Wading out until the water came up to Henry’s chest they started to play Frisbee and Emma found herself occasionally looked up to check on Regina, which was absolutely pointless as the brunette was ignoring them and too engrossed in her book.

Emma started to hold her breath and float in the water and relax, she taught Henry how to dive under the water and do a handstand. After a while they went back to playing with the Frisbee and experimented with how far they could throw it to each other before realising they both had terrible aim so gradually floated closer to each other.

“Okay, Kid, it’s been a while, time to reapply that lotion,” Emma said and tilted her head towards the beach.

Henry moaned but he knew it was no good as Emma was militant about sun safety as she was so fair herself. They walked back towards the beach and Emma smiled as she noticed that Regina was watching them over the top of her book, thinking her line of vision was hidden by her sunglasses. Emma put a little more sway into her hips and made no move to tame her wild, wet hair.

Henry sat heavily on the middle sun lounger and Regina looked up and acted surprised to see them, “have you been having fun, Henry?”

“Yeah,” Henry panted as he drank some water that Emma passed him.

“He’s a strong swimmer,” Emma said as she took a drink from her own water bottle.

“I can dive underwater now,” Henry told Regina excitedly, “it stings your eyes a little at first but when you get used to it it’s fine.”

“Wonderful,” Regina smiled with immense pride.

“Emma could teach you how to swim,” Henry said, “then we could all play Frisbee.”

“I... uh,” Regina hesitated.

“Maybe your mom is happy reading her book and doesn’t want to learn to swim today,” Emma helpfully added.

“You’ll love it, Mom, it’s so much fun,” Henry pushed a little and then produced his sad face as he mumbled, “please?”

Emma had to turn away to prevent herself from choking with laughter into her bottle of water but somehow Regina seemed to fall for it again.

“Very well,” Regina said with a frown towards the water, “if you’re agreeable?”

“Sure,” Emma said, “but Henry, you’ll have to stay near the water’s edge, I can’t watch both of you.”

Henry nodded and stood up, “I’ll play in the wet sand.”

Regina grabbed his arm and gently pulled him back and started to feel his skin on his neck and shoulders, “you need more lotion and then I want you to wear your t-shirt.”

Henry rolled his eyes before flopping down on the edge of Regina’s sun lounger as she applied a thick layer of high factor sun lotion. When she was done she threw Henry’s t-shirt on his head jokily and he darted towards the edge of the sea with his Frisbee and began happily digging a hole in the wet sand.

“Sure you want to do this?” Emma asked Regina.

“Henry wants me to,” Regina said as she started to walk towards the water.

“Okay,” Emma said, not happy that she hadn’t exactly received a proper answer to her question, “have you ever been in any water before?”

“A bath,” Regina shrugged her shoulders.

“Okay,” Emma breathed out as they started to walk into the sea, “the first thing to remember is that the sea has undercurrents.”

Regina nodded, “so I understand.”

“They can be quite strong, they’re okay today but the water can still be stronger than you think,” Emma said as they waded deeper, the water up to their thighs. Small waves were pushing against them and Regina frowned at the pressure and took a step closer to Emma.

“Are you a strong swimmer?” Regina asked as she eyed up the water.

“Yes,” Emma nodded, “I’ll be right here,” she said reading the meaning behind the question.

When they got to the point where the water was starting to cover Regina’s stomach Emma paused and turned to the brunette, “okay, we need to practice arm movements.”

“Yes, yes,” Regina waved her hand to dismiss the idea, “you do this with your arms and kick your legs,” she demonstrated a half-hearted movement, “I know all that, I’ve seen people do it.”

Emma sighed, “yes but doing it yourself is different so practice with me,” Emma started to demonstrated proper arm movements and waited for Regina to stop rolling her eyes and actually copy her. After a while Emma smiled, “that’s really good, okay we’re going to go a little deeper and then I’m going to hold you up while you practice that while kicking your legs out.”

“Hold me up?” Regina raised an eyebrow.

“I assure you it’s a tested teaching method,” Emma laughed as she took a few more steps out.

“Just be aware that our son is no doubt watching,” Regina said sternly as the water crept up her body.

“This from the woman who was about to rip her clothes off a couple of hours ago,” Emma laughed.

Regina was about to answer when she suddenly slipped off a ledge and into a deeper part of the sea, “Emma!”

Emma saw her fall and rushed to grab her as she started to disappear under the water, grabbing her by her sides and pulling her up again. Regina looked panicked, the water had got as far as her nose and she had clearly breathed in some water as she fell.

“It’s okay, I’ve got you, stop struggling,” Emma said gently as Regina flailed about in fright.

“Emma, have you got me?” Regina demanded as she attempted to find the sandy ground with her feet.

“I have you, sweetheart,” Emma said, the loving reference falling from her lips without a second thought, “I’m going to move us back so you can put your feet down again.”

Regina gripped onto Emma with such a strength that Emma wondered if her upper arms would be bruised. The whole thing was over in a few seconds and Emma placed Regina down on solid ground but Regina refused to let go of Emma as she coughed and spluttered.

“The floor disappeared,” Regina said in between coughs as she stared darkly down into the water.

“Yeah, sometimes there are uneven bits, it’s the currents I mentioned,” Emma said as she continued to hold the terrified woman.

“You didn’t mention that,” Regina said as she continued to look around her into the water to assure herself that she was safe, “you didn’t mention the ground would swallow me up.”

Emma calmly continued, “I’m sorry, I didn’t know there were any ledges like that, Henry and I didn’t encounter any, if I knew I would have been a lot more careful, are you okay?”

Regina took a few deep breaths and coughed up a little more seawater and slowly nodded, “yes,” she looked around, “yes, I’m ready to continue.”

“You want to carry on?” Emma asked in surprise as she had been certain that Regina would demand to go back to the beach.

“Yes, you’ve yet to teach me how to swim,” Regina said as if it were obvious that she would want to continue.

“Okay, just some people would want a break after that,” Emma said.

“I’m not some people,” Regina retorted, “but I’m not letting go of you again.”

Emma nodded, “I’m not letting go of you either,” she wouldn’t admit it to Regina but the incident had shaken her slightly too.

A while later Henry looked up from the large sculpture he was building to see his adoptive mother taking her first few strokes without Emma holding her. It didn’t last long and she didn’t travel far but she certainly was swimming on her own and Henry grinned happily when he saw the look of delight on her face.

Chapter 59

After a long day at the beach building sandcastles, swimming, playing Frisbee and generally hanging out they all returned to their hotel rooms exhausted but happy. It was decided that they would go out for a nice meal at one of the hotel's restaurants and arranged to meet up again after they'd all showered and changed.

Emma stood under the hot stream of water thinking about the day and deciding what to wear that evening. She considered going casual but then she really wanted to impress Regina by showing that she could scrub up nicely. However Henry would be with them and she didn't want to make it look too much like she was trying too hard, while she loved Henry dearly she was hoping that he would ask to go on an all-day excursion sometime soon to give her and Regina some time alone.

The hot water felt so good against her skin, helping to rid her from the endless grains of sand that seemed to be covering her body and in her hair. Allowing Henry to bury her in the sand was probably not her greatest plan, especially when Regina gave him money to go and get cold drinks for everyone. The second he was gone Regina looked at Emma like a wild cat about to corner its prey before she started slowly reapplying sun lotion all over her body.

When Henry finally returned and freed Emma from the heavy sand she was dizzy and stumbled around until she sat on her sun lounger and quickly downed the cold drink he had gotten for her. She claimed it was the lack of movement and the heat of the sun but it hadn't been either, it was more that all of the blood in her body had rushed between her legs and how her mind kept playing over and over what she wanted to do to Regina.

Exiting the shower Emma opened her wardrobe and picked out a simple, white cotton summer dress which had thin straps and showed off just enough cleavage to be eye catching. She tied her hair up in an elaborate up-do and looked at herself in the mirror. She stared at herself for a while as she

wondered if Regina would like this look on her, she fretted that maybe Regina only liked the more masculine side of Emma. Maybe Regina would think she looked stupid trying to be girlie when it obviously didn't come as naturally to her.

Emma didn't really identify with being masculine or feminine, she was just as happy wearing a dress as she was wearing jeans. She liked fixing her hair and wearing makeup but her time in Storybrooke hadn't really given her much chance of showing the more feminine side to her personality and now she agonised about it.

She quickly decided that getting changed was the best plan, while she wouldn't look like she made an effort at least it would be what Regina was expecting and therefore wouldn't be something she could mock her for. She reached around and unzipped her dress a little when there was a knock on the interconnecting door.

“Er, hold on,” Emma said.

The door flew open and Regina marched in wearing a white dress embellished with large magenta flowers and a matching cardigan that fitted her like a second skin.

Regina looked Emma up and down for a moment and then smiled, “oh, good,” she sighed in relief, “it suddenly occurred to me that we may clash but you’re wearing white.”

Regina stepped closer to Emma and smiled appreciatively, “you look beautiful, I like your hair up,” she commented as she zipped Emma’s dress back up, “you may want a cardigan, there may be a chill in the restaurant with the air conditioning, I have a white cardigan if you would like to borrow it?”

Emma stared wordlessly at Regina, the brunette had just stormed in uninvited and somehow made everything okay. All of Emma’s unspoken fears had been instantly addressed and quashed and now Regina stood there looking at her with a bright smile on her face like Emma was the only thing in the world that mattered.

“Emma?” Regina questioned, realising the blonde hadn’t said a single word since she arrived.

“Oh,” Emma shook herself out of her dream state, “right, erm, no, I have a cardigan. Thank you though.”

Regina continued to regard Emma curiously and gently brought the back of her hand up to Emma’s forehead to check her temperature, “did we spend a little too much time in the sun?”

“I’m not suffering with heatstroke,” Emma smiled, “just hungry.”

Regina rolled her eyes, though not unkindly, “well, come on then, between you and Henry I’ll have an emergency on my hands if we don’t find you both some food soon.”

They all dined in a Mexican themed restaurant downstairs and Henry spoke excitedly about the day, starting with his painting lesson and then talking about the fun he had at the beach and asking if they could go back again soon. Emma had brought the activity schedule for the kid’s club, under the guise of ensuring that Henry didn’t miss any great activities.

Henry picked out a few things he wanted to go to but looked guilty about leaving both women alone while he went off with the kid’s club. Both Emma and Regina did their best to assure him that while they would miss him they would only be doing boring adult things like catching up on reading anyway. Henry wasn’t sure and said he would think about it in the morning as he was exhausted with all the swimming he had done that day.

Agreeing to watch a movie in room they left the hotel and set up Regina’s television to watch the second instalment of Shrek, mainly for Henry but Regina had to admit she was rather intrigued with the franchise.

An hour in and Henry was falling asleep and Regina sent him to go and get ready for bed and Emma said that she was also exhausted and was going to have an early night. She gave Regina a gentle kiss on the lips as she smiled and went back to her own room and closed the door behind her with a happy sigh.

Emma stripped off her dress and bra, leaving her panties on and threw a tank top on for bed. She was asleep as soon as her head hit the pillow and enjoying dreams of driving a speedboat like she had seen out on the sea earlier that day.

Suddenly she could hear Regina's voice and her dream helpfully inserted Regina into the fantasy and they both held the steering wheel of the speedboat and laughed as they sped over the waves.

“Emma.”

The speedboat faded and Emma opened her eyes to see Regina sitting on the edge of her bed and looking down at her with a smile. Emma blinked a few times as she started to remember where she was and then looked at Regina with a frown, “Regina? Are you okay?”

“Sorry to wake you,” Regina said, “I... I can’t sleep.”

“Oh,” Emma said as she shuffled up a little so she was sitting up with her back against the headboard, she rubbed her eyes sleepily to try to wake up, “want to talk about it?”

“Yes,” Regina said and Emma instantly woke up because that was the last answer she was expecting.

“Oh,” Emma said again, “okay.”

“I keep thinking about Greg Mendell,” Regina said, “and... I want to talk to you about it.”

Chapter 60

Emma wasn't the best morning person, especially when she was being woken up in the middle of the night and she knew she had to quickly pull herself together in order to have a very serious conversation with a person famed for not wanting to talk.

Regina was looking at her thoughtfully and Emma knew in that moment that the brunette was considering that she'd made a terrible error and was about to flee the room.

"That's great, Regina," Emma said, attempting to sound as genuine and awake as possible, "do you want something to drink or do you want to sit here?"

Regina shrugged, "I'm not sure. I want to talk, that's the whole reason we're here, isn't it?"

Emma shifted ears mentally to catch up with Regina's switch towards defensive, clearly now becoming embarrassed and wishing she hadn't initiated the discussion.

"Not the only reason, but I'm glad you want to talk to me," she said calmly, not riding to Regina's bait.

"I'm... not sure where to start," Regina admitted.

"Anywhere you like," Emma replied as she did her best not to stare at Regina's dark red silk nightie.

"I wanted to die," Regina said in a distant voice as she looked into the darkness of the bedroom and away from Emma.

Emma was glad Regina didn't see her shocked reaction, "b-because of the pain?"

“Partly,” Regina allowed, “and partly because I felt I deserved it at that point.”

Emma swallowed down the immediate denial that came to mind, she didn’t know much about this but she knew that she had to allow Regina to talk and to express her feelings. Throwing her own points of view in was not going to help Regina sort through her conflicting emotions over what happened.

“Why did you feel like you deserved it?” Emma asked, hoping that Regina didn’t bristle at the psychology professor styling of the question.

“I murdered his father,” Regina turned to look at Emma seriously.

“Does that mean you deserved to be tortured to death?” Emma asked with a confused expression, “I don’t think any civilised culture would agree...”

“I ruined his life, I took away his family because I wanted one of my own,” Regina attempted to explain to Emma.

“You wanted one of your own? A family?” Emma asked, she’d never heard much about the history of what happened with the younger Greg, formally Owen.

Regina sighed and looked away as she realised she had said just enough to pique Emma’s interest and she would have to share more in order to make herself understood.

“You know that, when the curse was enacted, the town landed on their campsite?” Regina asked quietly.

“Yes, I’d heard that,” Emma nodded as she watched Regina’s side profile, the older woman seemingly struggling to decide on the words she required.

“The curse had made everyone... compliant... no one stood up to me, I was free to do as I wished,” Regina turned to Emma with a small smile, “and then there was this boy, Owen, he sat in my seat at Granny’s.”

Emma laughed lightly, “you had a specific seat at Granny’s?”

Regina nodded, “yes, until Henry came along and then I would sit in a booth but at first I had a seat and Owen was sat in it. It was... off-putting but also refreshing, he treated me like I was ordinary. He gave me a gift, I kept it all the years until we met again.”

“He meant something to you,” Emma commented carefully.

“I wanted him to stay, to live in the town. Truth be told I wanted him to live with me but I didn’t want him to lose his father, I’d recently lost my father and I didn’t want him to go through that so soon after losing his mother. Owen was a troubled, grieving little boy. He asked me why I wasn’t a mother,” Regina snorted a small laugh before taking a deep breath, “I wanted him to stay. He challenged me and I felt he would love me, not see me like everyone else did.”

“But his father felt differently?” Emma asked.

“Kurt wanted to leave town, I tried to delay them but... well, once he saw me talking to Graham’s heart and ordering him to arrest Kurt for drunk driving... he fled,” Regina shook her head sadly, “we chased their car, took a short cut and got in front of them. Kurt told Owen to run and he did, Graham arrested Kurt and I called after Owen and... I-I told him I didn’t want to hurt him, I said that I thought he wanted to stay. And then I saw the fear in his face, he was terrified of me.”

Regina took a deep breath, “I told him I was sorry and I let him go, he ran. The curse landed on top of them so he was able to cross the line and maintain his memory but the protection around the town remained so he couldn’t get back. Kurt was too big a risk so... so I killed him.”

Regina turned to Emma and attempted to justify her actions, “I-I was just out from the Enchanted Forest, still ninety-nine percent evil.”

“I understand,” Emma nodded calmly. And strangely enough she did, she was slightly concerned that her grasp of the sanctity of life was loosening every day she spent with fairy tale characters. It had become a new way of life for her, understanding that death was more natural to them. They came

from a harsher landscape, kill or be killed. While she could never condone murder she had learnt to live with the darkened histories they all had.

Regina looked into Emma's sympathetic eyes and nodded her gratitude before sighing, "so, I destroyed his life. He spent the next twenty nine years wondering what happened to his father, trying to get back. All he wanted was his family back."

"So, he didn't know his father was dead?" Emma queried.

"Not until I told him," Regina explained.

"And... when did you do that?" Emma frowned.

"When I could feel myself dying," Regina shrugged lightly.

Emma blinked, "when, when he was electrocuting you, you... you told him his father was dead?"

"I told him I killed his father," Regina nodded.

Emma swallowed as she understood in that moment, "you wanted to die."

Regina looked at the plush carpet and remained silent.

"It must have been incredibly painful," Emma said somewhat obviously but hoping that it would be the nudge Regina needed to continue talking.

Emma had spoken with Mary Margaret again about the teardrop that she had used to find Regina that terrible day and as Emma listened to her mother's story something horrific had occurred to her. Time. A large amount of time had passed between Mary Margaret experiencing the torture through the magical teardrop, they had had to decipher what it meant and get to the cannery, find the correct building and search all the floors.

Mary Margaret had been in pieces after only a few seconds experiencing the pain that Regina had gone through, she still woke up screaming from nightmares about what she had seen and felt. Yet that was probably only five percent of what Regina had gone through and in all that time it took them to

find her, Greg had been cranking up the dial higher and higher to increase the flow of electricity.

“I shouldn’t complain,” Regina said so quietly that Emma almost missed it.

Emma wanted to explode, to tell Regina that of course she had the right to complain but she took a calming breath, “what was it like?”

She knew it was a gamble but she also knew Regina was holding back and asking the brunette to talk about it, even the most terrible parts of it, was going to allow her some closure on the matter.

“Like nothing I’ve ever experience before,” Regina shook her head ruefully.

Emma remained silent in the hope that Regina would continue and after a while she did, “the room was cold, and each burst was searingly hot. I felt powerless, not just because my magic was being blocked but because I had no control. During the burst I... my muscles contracted painfully and my nerve endings all felt like they were burning. I couldn’t control my body’s movements at all.”

Regina slid off of the bed and approached the head of the bed where Emma sat up against the headboard and climbed onto the bed so she sat beside the blonde, not touching but close enough to feel her comfort.

“My heart was thundering, it felt like it was out of control and like it would just give out at any moment,” Regina continued, staring forward as if remembering every detail.

Emma sat beside her, not making eye contact and instead looking at Regina’s feet as they burrowed there way under the sheets and into the warm bedding.

“I... taunted him,” Regina admitted.

“You didn’t want him to see how much he was hurting you,” Emma understood.

“Yes, and... I... I knew that Henry was angry with me, I didn’t think I’d be able to get him back in my life so I didn’t much care at that point if he did kill me,” Regina admitted.

Emma swallowed as she considered her role in Henry’s absence from Regina’s life and wondered briefly about the terrifying scenario where Regina pushed Greg so far that he followed through and managed to kill her. Regina didn’t fight back because she’d lost the most important person in her life and Emma knew she had a big part to play in that.

“Would you act differently now?” Emma asked cautiously, almost fearing the answer.

“No,” Regina admitted and Emma’s heart sunk.

“I’m too stubborn,” Regina continued, “I wouldn’t want him to see that he was hurting me. But I wouldn’t want to die,” she admitted, “not like then, I realise now I have something to live for. People to live for.”

Regina reached across and gently threaded her fingers through Emma’s hand, “thank you for not taking advantage of me earlier, I’m sorry I acted the way I did.”

Emma smiled and lay her head on Regina’s shoulder, “don’t apologise, having a beautiful woman all over you with jealous lust is actually pretty damn great.”

Regina laughed, “you were very chivalrous.”

“Yeah,” Emma said sadly, “it was a close thing.”

Regina laughed again, “good thing Henry interrupted us when he did, I didn’t realise I was almost too much for you to handle, Miss Swan.”

Emma chuckled, “I’ve not had sex for six years, if I’d started when you first kissed me it could have been all over by the time Henry came back.”

Regina’s head snapped around to look at the blonde in surprise, “six years?”

Emma winced at her slip and lifted her head from Regina's shoulder, "erm, yeah."

Regina looked at her in surprise, she'd expected Emma to have had a number of lovers over the years and never would she have imagined that Emma would have been celibate for such a long time.

"It's okay, I'm not going to jump you," Emma quickly added, "and when we... I mean if we do... anything... I'll try to make it good and, like, last... I was just kidding, I'm not going to be like wham and it's over..."

"Emma," Regina stopped the blonde from her mindless ramblings, "it's fine, I was just surprised, I thought you would have been beating them away with a stick."

Emma shrugged, "I just didn't want to let anyone in, you know?"

Regina smiled and nodded carefully, "well, thank you anyway, for being the bigger person. And for listening just now, I'm sorry I woke you."

"I'm glad you did," Emma said honestly, "do you feel any better?"

Regina considered it for a moment, "I suppose maybe I do, it is nice to... voice these things."

"My door is always open," Emma smiled.

Regina smiled and squeezed Emma's hand slightly before letting it go, "I should let you get back to sleep and get back in case Henry wakes up and wonders where I am."

Emma nodded and tried to keep the disappointment from her expression, "okay, but if you can't sleep then come back and we can talk, or watch television or whatever."

Regina slid off of the bed and smiled gratefully at the blonde, "goodnight, Emma."

“Night, Regina,” Emma said as she watched the brunette disappear into the darkness of the room next door and closing the door behind her.

Chapter 61

A gentle but repetitive knocking was what woke Emma up again. She opened her eyes and realised it was morning judging by the lightness of the room, “yeah,” she called out and a moment later Henry came through the door.

He closed the door behind him and walked to stand between the two beds in Emma’s room, “hey,” he said quietly.

“Hey,” Emma said as she rubbed her eyes and sat up in bed, the Mills family were obviously trying to break her through lack of sleep.

“Mom said that you’d take me down to breakfast this morning,” he said quietly.

“Oh,” Emma frowned, “sure, is she joining us?”

“She said I could pick her up some fruit,” he said distantly.

“Okay,” Emma looked at him for any clues, “is everything okay?”

“She said she didn’t sleep well and she has another headache,” Henry whispered whilst looking at the door to check Regina wasn’t there, “the vacation’s supposed to make her better.”

Emma worried her lip for a moment, “it’s not that simple, Henry, it will take time.”

“I know,” Henry sighed, “I just don’t wanna see her in pain anymore.”

“Henry, I know you’ve probably read the same websites that I have so you know that it has to get worse before it can get better, she has to process her feelings and that takes time,” Emma looked at him softly, “but it’s better this way than she keeps bottling things up. Now I think it’s best if we get out of her hair for a while and let her rest, what do you think?”

“Can we go in the pool?” Henry asked with a small smile.

“Absolutely,” Emma smiled, “let me just get dressed and we’ll get some breakfast.”

In the next room Regina lay in bed staring at the ceiling much like she had done the entire evening. She replayed the events of her day with Greg Mendell over and over in her mind in a way she had never done before. Usually she forced the memories from her mind, doing everything she could to focus on anything else.

Her coping mechanisms had always been the same, vengeance or ignorance. Of course during her reign as queen she had usually taken a view towards vengeance but since the curse had lifted she had suppressed everything. The breaking of the curse, suppressed. The taking of her son, suppressed. The anger of the town, suppressed. The actions of Greg Mendell, suppressed.

She supposed that it was only a matter of time before she ran out of storage space for all those suppressed feelings and she wasn’t entirely surprised that her magic had begun to go awry.

She had already ventured down the path of vengeance and she knew it was a dark and pointless path that only led to more heartache. Her quest for redemption was real and she refused to turn towards the darkness again.

Ignorance was clearly not working for her either and she had decided to take Emma’s advice and speak about her feelings, share details of the events of that day that she had never shared with anyone before. It had felt good, it had somehow felt right and a weight was lifted from her shoulders as she spoke to Emma about what had happened and her feelings about it.

While talking to Emma during the night she had felt a rush of emotion that she could not identify and so she left for the comfort and silence of her own bed so she could analyse those feelings. After some sleepless hours she realised that the emotions were akin to relief, talking about what had happened had allowed her to release some of the tension she felt.

This both pleased and troubled Regina in equal amounts, she was not used to sharing her thoughts and feelings with anyone, ever. The closest she had come to doing so was with her father and in her heart of hearts she knew she only really confided in him because she knew he would always agree with her. He loved her so dearly he would never tell her the truth, he only ever wanted for her to be happy and as the darkness consumed her he comforted her with words of agreement and understanding even though they were a sham.

As a young girl she only ever spent time with her mother and father and she learnt quickly not to tell her mother any of her true feelings. When she met Daniel she was so overpowered with feelings for him she didn't want to scare him off with the intensity of her emotions. And then came Snow. Backed into a corner and forced to trust the ten-year-old princess with her most precious secret.

From then on she had spoken to no one of her feelings. The closest person to her had been Henry but Regina had always been aware that he was a child and as such she kept a portion of herself hidden to allow him to have a childhood and not end up as his mother's one and only confidante.

And now there was Emma. While Regina had undoubtedly taken the first step into confiding and trusting the blonde she didn't know if she could continue to take the risk. Laying her heart and soul out for Emma could be catastrophic, Regina had never trusted anyone and any betrayal now would surely destroy her.

The sound of the interconnecting door opening caused her to look over and see Henry enter the room and say hello as he went to his wardrobe. A moment later Emma cautiously appeared at the door and looked over at Regina with a timid smile, "hey."

Regina carefully sat up in bed and smiled back, a small wince showing plainly on her face due to the headache pounding behind her eyes.

Emma took that as an invitation and stepped into the room with a small paper bag, "I brought you a croissant, an apple, a banana and some grapes."

Regina smiled gratefully and Henry announced that he would get changed in the bathroom. Emma placed the bag on the desk and looked around uncomfortably, “so, Henry says you’re not feeling too great?”

A knowing smile formed on Regina’s lips, “just attempting to catch up on some sleep and get my thoughts in order.”

Emma nodded, “if there’s anything I can do...”

“You really mean that, don’t you?” Regina regarded her curiously.

“Of course,” Emma frowned, “why wouldn’t I?”

Regina considered it for a moment before honestly replying, “I’m not used to such kindness.”

Emma shrugged and looked down at her feet, “well, I think that’s a shame.”

Regina regarded the blonde for a moment before changing topic, “so, what are your plans?”

“We’re going down to the pool for a while, I thought you might like some peace,” Emma said, “unless you want some company?”

Quickly shaking her head Regina replied, “no, I think I’ll try to catch up on some sleep and then I’ll join you.”

“Great, I’ll save you a sun lounger,” Emma smiled as she backed up to go back into her room.

“Emma?” Regina called.

“Mmm?” Emma looked up.

Regina stared at her for a moment. Emma Swan was many things, she may have been the product of true love and the Saviour but that did not make her a two dimensional person. She could be independent and strong at times and in others frightened and needing reassurance. She was goofy and ridiculous and

then suddenly calm and wise. In essence, she wasn't like anyone Regina had ever met before.

If Regina was going to try to open up and trust someone then there was no better choice than the woman who stood in front of her. The woman who had suffered the trials of being abandoned in a strange world, had fought through terrible odds in foster homes and even prison and had won. The woman who loved her long-lost son with a passion so strong it had initially terrified Regina to her core.

“Regina?” Emma frowned at Regina’s continuing silence.

“Thank you for breakfast,” Regina smiled casually.

Emma regarded her for a moment but soon smiled and nodded her head as she exited the room.

Chapter 62

Regina sat at a table on the raised poolside restaurant overlooking Henry and Emma playing in the pool below her. She hadn't told them that she had ventured out of her room and had been discreetly watching them for around half an hour when a familiar voice approached, "hello again, can I get you anything?"

She turned to see the waiter who had served them their first night at the hotel, he was casually spinning a circular waiting tray and smiling at her warmly.

Regina picked up the menu from the table and started to look at it and the waiter looked down towards the pool where Regina had been looking.

"Your son has been practicing diving all morning, he's very good," he smiled politely.

"Yes, Henry does generally excel when he puts his mind to things," Regina agreed.

"Your wife seems to be a good teacher."

"Oh, she's..." Regina looked up, "she's not my wife."

The waiter looked mortified, "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to make assumptions, it's just I remember her saying 'our son' so I assumed. My apologies."

"It's quite all right," Regina said.

"My partner wants to move out of Florida so we can get married," the waiter offered, "he really hates that we can't just be who we are here."

Regina attempted to keep her surprise hidden, "does he?"

“Yeah, but then I have my job and he has his, we’d have to move our entire lives,” he said with a sad shrug.

“That would be rather difficult,” Regina allowed.

“Where are you guys from? If you don’t mind me asking?”

“Maine,” Regina said indifferently.

“Cool, you were one of the first states to legalise same sex marriage,” he said before wincing at himself, “sorry, I’m sure you already know that. I just speak without thinking sometimes.”

Regina smiled as if to tell him it was no bother, “forgive me if I’m being rude,” she said carefully, “but do you really feel that marriage would make a difference to your relationship?”

“Oh sure,” he smiled happily, “I’d be able to say to people that I’m married, I could introduce Stew as my husband and not my partner or my boyfriend. I think just saying that you’re married gives your relationship more standing in other people’s eyes, you know? Like if I said ‘my boyfriend’ you might think I’d only met him a couple of weeks ago but we could have been together for ten years or something.”

Regina nodded thoughtfully, “but surely that’s only relevant if you care what other people think about you?”

He considered this for a minute before shaking his head, “no, not exactly, I mean I want to show Stew I love him and I want him in my life forever. What’s more romantic than saying to someone that you want them to accept your hand in marriage? That you want to spend every day of your life loving them and cherishing them?”

Regina almost scoffed, “is that what you think marriage is?”

He laughed, “marriage is a word, it’s whatever you make it. To me it means that I am willing to commit my life to someone else, that I will love them and they are everything I need to be happy.”

Regina tilted her head to one side and regarded the passionate young man with a sincere smile, “Stew is a very lucky man. I’m Regina by the way,” she held out her hand.

“Todd,” he smiled and shook her head, “I can’t call you Regina though, my boss would kill me.”

“Then call me Miss Mills,” Regina smiled.

Down by the pool Emma was watching as Henry climbed up the stairs towards the waterslide and smiled, it was about his fifteen consecutive journey on the slide each time demanding that Emma watched him. To Emma’s untrained eyes it looked like he was just doing the same thing each time but he assured her that he was coming down the slide in different ways each time.

Boredom was beginning to set in and she lay on her back and floated in the water casually as she wondered if she should give Regina a call to check she was okay. A moment later she felt soft hands touching her shoulder and quickly sat up and spun around to see Regina smiling back at her.

“God, Regina, you scared me,” she put her hand over her chest in surprise.

“I saw you watching Henry on his umpteenth time on the slide so I thought you might want some company,” Regina explained as she looked at Emma’s bikini appreciatively. The swimming costume from the previous day had been retired in favour of something white and revealing and Regina had to say she approved.

For her part Emma was appreciating the view of Regina in her own royal blue bikini as she struggled to form words, “err, cool, yeah, thank you, Henry... yeah...”

Regina laughed and gently placed two fingers under Emma’s chin and adjusted her head, “up here, Emma.”

Emma blushed furiously, “God, I am so sorry, what a leech.”

“Not at all,” Regina laughed as she looked over to where Henry was waving at her from the top of the ladders to the slide, “I did my viewing while you were floating in the water before I arrived,” she winked.

Emma gave a surprised laugh, “so you’re feeling better then?”

“Much improved,” Regina nodded as she watched the slide, “here he comes.”

Henry splashed into the water at the bottom of the slide and excitedly ran towards them, “did you see? Mom, did you see?”

“Yes I did, Henry,” Regina beamed, “I’ve been watching you for a while, very impressive!”

“That time was much faster because I pointed my toes,” Henry told her enthusiastically.

“I wonder if you’d go faster if you held your body straight,” Regina pondered.

Henry’s eyes blew wide open at the thought, “I’ll try,” he shouted as he spun around, “watch me!”

As soon as he was gone Regina turned to Emma, “would you like to go to a nice dinner tonight? Just the two of us?”

“Sure,” Emma said quickly before looking at Henry’s retreating form, “er, what about the kid?”

“There’s another movie on tonight, he can have a quick snack and then go with the kid’s club,” Regina said.

Emma nodded, “I thought you wanted to watch him even when he was with kid’s club when he was in the pool?”

“I’ve found a workaround,” Regina said with a smile and a nod up towards the poolside restaurant where Todd looked down and waved back to her.

“Him!?” Emma asked angrily.

“His name is Todd,” Regina replied, “he is working in the kid’s club this evening and he offered to keep a special eye on Henry for us while we have a nice, quiet, romantic dinner together.”

Emma rage died down at the word ‘romantic’, “oh, he... oh he did?”

“Yes, he thinks we’re a cute couple,” Regina smiled at Emma, “he told me when he was telling me about his boyfriend.”

“Oh!” Emma nodded her head and then smiled at the realisation that the muscular young man was not only in a relationship but also gay, “oh, cool.”

“I thought about the steakhouse,” Regina said as she waved to Henry who was again at the top of the slide ladder, “then you can have a proper meal, red meat for energy,” Regina smiled dangerously at Emma.

Emma just nodded distractedly, she didn’t see Henry come down the slide as all her attention seemed to have vanished at the thought of a proper romantic dinner with Regina.

Chapter 63

“Emma?” Regina asked as she reached a hand across the table and gripped the blonde’s hand lightly, “are you okay?”

“Sure, fine,” Emma said too quickly as her eyes fluttered over Regina’s perfect hair, immaculate makeup and low cut dress.

“You’ve been strange since we arrived,” Regina frowned, “are you coming down with something?”

Emma took a deep breath and looked Regina in the eye seriously, “yes, I’ve got a massive case of scared-I’m-going-to-mess-this-up-itis.”

Regina laughed and pulled her hand back, “oh, that does sound serious.”

“It is,” Emma nodded her head quickly, “it happens when a beautiful woman wants to take you out on a romantic date, you obviously agree but the second you arrive in the restaurant you suddenly forget how to speak, how to act, you can’t stop staring at aforementioned beautiful woman’s amazing...” she coughed lightly, “assets, you say things you probably shouldn’t say and generally worry that you are going to mess everything up.”

A waiter appeared at their table and wordlessly handed them both a menu before disappearing again, Regina looked over the top of her menu at Emma, “sounds terrible, is there a cure?”

“Yeah, death,” Emma nodded as she examined the menu, “this big hole in the ground swallows you up. But it does mean that you don’t mess up the date so you kinda welcome it.”

Regina let out a small snigger, “sounds very drastic, is there some other way to overcome the illness? Maybe some kind of relaxation technique? Maybe the realisation that the woman who asked you on a romantic date is also rather nervous?”

Emma looked over the top of her menu and met Regina's eyes, "you're Regina Mills, nothing scares you."

"Oh, plenty scares me," Regina said sincerely, "being in the company of a beautiful woman who, for some unknown reason, agreed to go on a romantic date with me. Worried that she'll finally see me for who I am and will realise she is far too good to be with me."

Emma found herself speechless for a moment before shaking her head, "if anyone is too good for someone, it's you being too good for me. You're so far out of my league it's laughable."

Regina smiled, "maybe we should both accept that the other has some terribly flawed sense of character judgement and relish in it?"

Emma grinned, "I'd drink to that if we had a drink," she looked at the back page of the menu, "wine?"

"Please," Regina said quickly before blushing.

Emma laughed, "red or white?"

"I'm having steak so red?" Regina said.

"I'm having a burger so red's good," Emma nodded.

"Red wine and a burger," Regina rolled her eyes, "maybe I am too good for you," she jested.

"Hey, it's a gourmet burger, it has all kinds of posh stuff on it," Emma laughed.

"It's still a burger," Regina pointed out, "no matter how you dress it up."

"It's being dressed in a lightly dusted ciabatta," Emma said matter-of-factly as she closed her menu with a nod.

"Classy," Regina laughed.

The waiter came and took their order and they both started to relax as they discussed Henry's enjoyment of the hotel facilities and the beautiful view from the restaurant. Regina spoke briefly about Todd and his misapprehension that they were a married couple before asking about plans for the next day.

"I'd like to borrow the car in the morning," Regina said as she looked at the dessert menu.

"Oh?" Emma didn't want to pry, of course Regina had every right to take the car and do whatever she likes.

"And Henry," Regina said, "oh, cheesecake, now there's something that Granny can't quite master."

"So, you want to take the car and Henry tomorrow morning?" Emma questioned, hoping that Regina would give her a little more information.

"That's right, a couple of hours at the most, I'm sure you can entertain yourself," Regina said as she closed her dessert menu.

"Er, yeah, sure," Emma said as she realised she hadn't even looked at her own menu yet, "I don't mean to pry..."

"Then don't," Regina smiled, "it's nothing to be concerned about."

"Sure, okay," Emma said but the niggling worry remained.

"And I have another request," Regina said as Emma attempted to study the menu and decide upon her own dessert.

"Yes?" Emma asked without looking up.

"I'd like to come to your room again this evening," Regina said casually as she sipped on her wine.

Emma felt like all the oxygen had been sucked out of the restaurant, "er, sure, yeah..."

“I felt vastly improved after our talk last night and I would like to spend some more time with you after Henry has gone to bed,” Regina said as she looked at Emma with a grin, “you know, talk... and... well... not talk.”

The waiter appeared to take their orders and Regina politely pointed out her choice of cheesecake while Emma hurriedly handed the menu to the waiter, “you pick,” she said, “surprise me.”

As soon as the confused waiter left Emma looked at Regina seriously, “are you saying what I think you’re saying?”

“All I’m saying is I enjoy your company, I would like to see you alone without Henry and waiters around. Just the two of us. And if that turns into something more then I wouldn’t complain, I’m not saying that we’re going to...” she waved her hand distractedly, “whatever the cool kids are calling it these days.”

Emma nodded even though she found herself more confused than she started, “okay, yes, I’d... I’d really like that. No pressure, we’ll, we’ll talk and see what happens.”

“Good,” Regina smiled and lifted her glass to toast Emma.

Emma raised her glass, “to your health, whoever you are, maybe you’ll tell me what you did with Regina Mills after dessert.”

Regina laughed, “it seems a vacation was exactly what I needed.”

Chapter 64

A happy but cold Henry greeted them after the movie, he was wrapped up in a towel and smiling happily as he saw his mothers walking towards him. He had been talking to Todd who looked up and politely nodded, “Miss Mills.”

Regina smiled from Todd to Henry, “did you have fun?”

Emma gave Todd a small, tight smile and focussed her attention on Henry.

“It was great, it was a really old movie about these monsters called Gremlins,” Henry laughed, “they go crazy when they get wet.”

“I’d just been born when that came out,” Emma mused and then grinned evilly at Regina, “how old were you?”

“About thirty-four,” Regina said lightly as she put her arm around Henry’s shoulder, “say thank you, Henry.”

“Thanks, Todd,” Henry said as the three of them walked away.

“No worries,” Todd waved them off.

“Todd’s well cool,” Henry said even though they probably weren’t quite out of earshot yet.

“He’s very nice,” Regina agreed.

“Can we watch a movie when we get to the room?” Henry asked.

“You’ve just watched a movie, Kid,” Emma pointed out.

“Yeah but I’m not ready for bed yet,” Henry said excitedly even though he shivered in the cold air conditioning of the hotel.

“See how you feel once you’ve had a shower,” Regina said as they entered the elevator, “you might feel tired once the adrenaline has worn off.”

Henry shrugged in youthful ignorance and Regina gave him the keycard, “run along and have a shower, I’ll be in Emma’s room when you’re done.”

As soon as the elevator doors opened a towel-clap Henry ran along the corridor towards their rooms.

“He had a good time,” Regina commented.

“Yeah,” Emma said, “because Todd’s well cool.”

Regina paused and regarded her, “are you jealous?”

“No!” Emma said and continued walking a few steps before stopping and looking back at Regina, “a little.”

“But he’s gay,” Regina laughed lightly.

“I know but... all my peeps think he’s so awesome, it’s not a sexual thing it’s just... him,” Emma grumbled.

“Am I one of your peeps?” Regina raised an eyebrow.

Emma smiled, “I hope so.”

They both started walking again and Emma asked, “do you think the kid will really want to watch another movie?”

“Doubtful,” Regina said with a shake of the head, “he’s been very active today and after the shower he’ll probably realise how tired he is. If not he can start watching a movie and I guarantee he’ll be asleep within twenty minutes.”

They walked the rest of the way in silence and when they got to Emma’s room she opened the door and flicked the lights on, “drink?”

“Tea, please,” Regina said as she put her bag on the floor and sat on the sofa, she watched as Emma prepared a cup of tea and a cup of coffee and smiled to herself.

“It occurred to me last night,” Regina said aloud, once the noisy kettle had finished boiling, “that I’ve never had a confidant, ever.”

Emma poured water into the two mugs, “sounds lonely.”

“I didn’t think it was until recently,” Regina admitted, “it seemed somewhat natural, you don’t miss what you never had.”

Emma brought the two mugs over and placed them on the coffee table, “you know you can talk to me.”

“Indeed,” Regina nodded as Emma sat next to her, “that was what made me consider the topic. I trust you. And I don’t trust easily.”

Emma nodded as she began to understand where Regina was heading, “you can trust me,” she stressed, “I won’t break a confidence.”

Regina smiled as her gaze clouded over and she remembered another time, “it’s not just that,” Regina said carefully, “of course the breaking of a confidence, the telling of a secret is a terrible thing. But there is something worse.”

Emma knew that Regina spoke of her history with Snow when she referred to the telling of a secret and considering how that ended up she wondered what could possibly be worse.

“Exploitation,” Regina said quietly, “while I certainly never spoke with anyone in any depths about the darker side of my feelings, my fears or my weaknesses I did speak of my hopes and wishes.”

“And they used it to manipulate you,” Emma nodded in understanding.

“Indeed, my mother, the King, Rumpelstiltskin, they all used knowledge of my feelings to manipulate me into doing what they wanted me to do,” Regina picked up her mug of tea and warmed her hands.

“But you,” Regina looked at Emma, “you don’t do that. When Gold set fire to my offices and you...”

“It’s okay, you can say it,” Emma grinned, “when I saved you.”

Regina sighed and half-smiled, “when you assisted me, you told me that was what decent human beings do. I don’t think I realised it at the time but I have come to understand that I have a woeful lack of decent human beings around me. And the ones I do have... I have struggled to allow them near to me. I have bottled things up, kept a great many secrets...”

Regina paused and sipped her tea before looking at Emma again, “I trust you, Emma, I don’t know why but I do.”

Emma nodded her head, “you can trust me, I know it’s not easy, hell I’ve struggled to trust people in my life and I know what you mean. But I would never do anything to hurt you, you can trust me, you can tell me whatever you like. I won’t judge, well, I might judge a bit but I’ll do my best to understand.”

Regina stared at Emma and then let out a small laugh which caused Emma to frown in confusion, “you really are a Charming,” she smiled, “as much as it infuriates me I think it’s one of your most endearing qualities.”

“Thanks, I think,” Emma grinned.

“What I’m trying to say,” Regina sighed, “is that I’ve spent all my life keeping things to myself, a protective measure. I’m not very good at opening up, I am not very good at sharing my feelings. But I’m trying to change that, I’m trying to change that with you.”

Emma smiled happily, “I appreciate that, I really do.”

“I’d kiss you now but I just heard the shower turn off next door,” Regina said just at the moment they heard Henry call out for her. Regina picked up her mug of tea in one hand and held out her other towards Emma, “come, let’s see what state your son is in.”

Chapter 65

Emma was having another amazing lifestyle dream, this time she was flying a plane. Emma Swan didn't know how to fly a plane but in the dream she was doing a damn good job and flying over her estate that she owned on the edge of the sea and down below in the water she could see Regina and Henry waving up at her. Everything was right with the world, she had a great house, she could fly a plane and the two most important people in the world were smiling and laughing.

Except suddenly it wasn't okay, there was something wrong, something wrong with the plane and it was shaking violently from one side to the other. Emma reached forward and tapped the dials but suddenly she realised she didn't know how to fly and started to panic.

“Emma.”

She looked out of the window of the plane to see Regina looking up at her, still smiling and waving, holding an ice cold beer for her by the looks of it.

“Emma!”

Emma's eyes flew open and she came face to face with a whole different Regina Mills, this one had no ice cold beer and this one looked angry.

“You made me crash my plane,” Emma complained.

Regina had been leaning over Emma and shaking her by the shoulders and now sat up with confusion, “I, again, question your sanity in asking a waiter to choose a dessert for you and then proceeding to munch down a pound of cheese before bed.”

Emma blinked a little as she started to wake up and slowly sat up in bed, she got the impression from Regina's mood that she would need to be sitting up for this.

“Why are you asleep?” Regina demanded, folding her arms across her chest.

Emma looked at her like she was insane, “er, because it’s eleven at night?”

“I told you I’d be coming in,” Regina glared at her.

“You said goodnight!” Emma argued back, “Henry was going to bed and you said goodnight and pushed me back into my room.”

“Well I was hardly about to say I’ll see you in thirty minutes in front of my son,” Regina retorted.

“Oh, so now he’s your son, he was mine earlier but once he’s a cute little boy again he’s yours?” Emma argued as she scrambled around to kneel up in bed to put her on a similar height level to where Regina stood beside the bed, “and I’m not psychic, I don’t know what you’re thinking, you said you wanted to come in and talk and you did! And then we went into your room, watched TV and went to bed, you said goodnight!”

Regina rolled her eyes, “you are such a Charming!”

Emma spluttered, “you said that was a good thing earlier!”

“I’ve changed my mind,” Regina huffed.

Emma held her hands up, “wait, wait, this is...” she sighed, “this isn’t doing either of us any good. I’m sorry, I didn’t understand what you meant.”

Regina licked her lips and Emma suddenly noticed that Regina was still fully dressed from dinner, a tight, red dress complete with perfect hair and perfect makeup.

“I’m sorry too,” the brunette finally allowed, “I’ve been waiting for Henry to fall asleep for ages, after you left he kept wanting to talk and... well... I’m sorry.”

Emma smiled and let out a sigh of relief, she really didn’t want to argue with Regina, “you totally made me crash my plane though.”

Regina laughed, “you were really dreaming that you were flying a plane?”

“Yeah, over this enormous house on the beach that I owned,” Emma grinned at the memory, “you were there.”

“In the plane?” Regina asked.

“No, in the sea, you were holding my beer for me,” Emma started to laugh.

Regina looked appalled for a moment before her facial expression changed into a darkened smile, “is that how you see me, Miss Swan? The little woman who holds your beer while you survey your grounds in your flying machine? You do know I’m a queen don’t you, dear?”

Regina had uncrossed her arms and placed them firmly on her hips and Emma swallowed hard as her brain tried and failed to think of a witty comeback.

“Do you need a little lesson in etiquette?” Regina raised an eyebrow as she grabbed Emma’s head with both her hands and pulled her forward and kissed her. The shock of the movement had Emma falling slightly forward and she found her hands resting on Regina’s hips to prevent from toppling forward.

Regina’s kiss was not gentle, it didn’t have a speck of decorum in it as Regina roughly pressed her open mouth against Emma’s until the blonde opened her mouth to follow suite. Just as Emma was starting to get into it Regina pulled her head back and let go of Emma’s head, “I’m over dressed,” she announced blandly.

Emma still had her hands on Regina’s hips and stared hungrily at Regina, “you look amazing.”

Regina looked at Emma with a strange look in her eye before taking a step back and Emma had to quickly balance herself again, “unzip me,” Regina ordered as she turned her back to Emma to display a long gold zip that ran all the way down her back to the bottom of the dress.

Emma stumbled off of the bed and nearly fell over in her haste to stand behind Regina and mentally scolded herself and told herself to get it together. She pulled on the zip and quickly moved it down Regina's back and watched in awe as a toned back gave way to the back of a red and black lace bustier. She knelt down as the zip passed over Regina's full behind and almost swallowed her tongue as she saw suspenders and stockings. Emma didn't even notice that the zipped had reached the end of its journey and the dress fell open at the back.

Regina slowly turned around and smiled down at Emma who was knelt in front of her and looking up at her with wide eyes. In a quick manoeuvre Regina pulled the dress off and quickly discarded it onto the spare bed beside her.

Emma had felt underdressed at dinner as she wore a casual summer dress and Regina looked like she was about to conquer the world's runways but now she realised that was nothing compared to now.

Regina stood in front of her in bustier, sheer panties, suspenders, stockings and high heels and Emma was wearing a pink G-string and mismatching red tank top. Regina could detect the change of mood in the room and the air of boldness fell from her quickly, "Emma?"

"You're amazing," Emma breathed as she looked up at her like she was still dreaming.

"So are you," Regina assured as she forced herself to swallow and held out her hand to help the blonde to her feet.

Emma stood up and paused for a moment, the break in atmosphere enough to give her time to think, "are you sure about this? Only yesterday you were thanking me for not taking advantage of you..."

"A lot has changed in twenty-four hours," Regina said distractedly and not making eye contact as she took a step forward to kiss Emma.

Emma took a step back and put her hand on Regina's chest to stop her from coming forward again, the contact nearly made her forget to breath and she

snatched her hand back quickly.

“What’s happened? Help me understand, this morning you had a headache and you were suffering and then suddenly you were fine, happy and inviting me on a date and then this...” Emma realised she was staring at Regina’s attire and took a deep breath as she looked at the ceiling, “I just need to know that you’re... okay, that this won’t be something you’ll regret.”

“This is for you,” Regina said with a smile, “I know it’s what you want, Emma.”

Emma swallowed and opened her eyes, “it is... you’re right, but is it what you want?”

Regina hesitated for a split second and it was all Emma needed, she quickly took a few steps back and picked up the hotel-issued white towelling robe that she’d hung over the desk chair earlier that night. She handed it to Regina with her eyes averted, “please put this on so we can talk properly, I don’t trust myself otherwise.”

Regina felt hurt and tossed aside for a tiny amount of time until she realised that Emma was being chivalrous yet again and was confused about Regina’s sudden change of attitude, something she could hardly blame the blonde for. She took the robe and put it on and sat on the edge of the spare bed and looked up at Emma with a half-smile.

Emma sat opposite on the edge of her own bed and pulled a sheet around to her to cover herself up a little.

“Just for the avoidance of doubt,” Emma started to explain while looking at the floor between their dangling feet, “I totally want to rip that robe off of your body and do really naughty things to you. Like, filthy things.”

Regina couldn’t help but laugh and she saw a smile form on Emma’s face too as the blonde continued, “but I can’t unless I know you want this because you want this. Because you’re ready to take this relationship to the next level, and not just because you know I want it. Because you mean so much to me and I will not fuck this up for one night of sex.”

“Emma,” Regina started.

“No, hear me out,” Emma said as she closed her eyes to attempt to rationalise her thoughts, “you told me that you don’t have much experience and the experiences you do have weren’t that great. You also said you weren’t used to these feelings and that you wanted to explore the physical side of our relationship slowly. This is not slowly.”

“No, it isn’t,” Regina admitted, half to herself.

“So, why now?” Emma asked as she finally opened her eyes and looked at Regina softly.

“I thought it was what you wanted,” Regina admitted, “I do have feelings, strong feelings for you and I wanted to make you happy,” she flicked her hands to her body, “this is the way I know how.”

Emma quickly moved from her bed to sit beside Regina and pulled her into a comforting embrace, “you make me happy, you don’t need to do this to make me happy you do that by being you,” she breathed into Regina’s thick hair.

Regina collapsed into the embrace and Emma thanked whatever part of her that had read the hesitation in Regina’s eyes and tone a thousand times over.

“You wanted to take this slowly,” Emma said carefully, “and I’m happy to do that, more than happy to do that, but I won’t jump into bed with you tonight.”

Regina nodded her head silently into Emma’s shoulder, “I’m sorry.”

Emma laughed gently, “oh, don’t be sorry, the sight of you in that outfit will be burnt into my brain and I fully expect a repeat performance, just maybe at the first year anniversary of our first date or something.”

Regina smiled and sat up and Emma saw unshed tears in her eyes, “can I stay?”

Emma nodded, “I’d really like you to.”

Regina smiled softly, “I’d like to get changed though.”

Emma rolled her eyes and sighed in jest, “ah, if you must, I’ll put the kettle on.”

Regina smiled, appreciating the humour.

“I seem to forever be in your debt, thank you again,” Regina said seriously.

“You don’t need to thank me,” Emma said, “I’m being incredibly selfish. I’m doing everything I can to improve the chances that I have you in my life for the long-term, just selfish.”

Regina chuckled and stood up, “I’ll be back in a couple of minutes, I just want to get changed and get this makeup off of my face.”

“I’ll be here,” Emma promised, “no more falling asleep and dreaming of planes.”

Regina shook her head as she headed quietly through the interconnecting door. The second she was gone Emma flopped on the spare bed and held her hands over her eyes as she let out a long, quiet moan. She was sure there was some kind of medal in her future.

Chapter 66

Emma finally peeled herself off of the bed and quickly changed her G-string into a pair of more robust panties and then added a pair of sleep shorts as well for good measure. She then boiled the kettle, because she said she would. Other than that she was a little lost about what she was supposed to do next.

Her mind continued to stray towards images of Regina and the clothing she was presumably currently changing out of. The baser parts of Emma's psyche cursed her for pushing Regina away and a mental image of the two of them writhing in bed flashed in her mind. She idly wondered what pleasurable noises Regina would make in bed, would she be a screamer, would the deep tones of the Evil Queen spring forth, would she moan or even be silent.

Emma picked the kettle up and emptied it into the sink, refilled it and put it on to boil again on autopilot before she realised the kettle had just boiled. She stared at herself in the mirror as she realised what she had done and noticed that she still had Regina's dark red lipstick smudged against her lips. Plucking a tissue from the box on the desk she removed the makeup and then stared at herself in the mirror again.

"You did the right thing, Swan," she whispered to her reflection, "it doesn't seem like it now but you'll be rewarded for this in the future."

The interconnecting door opened and Regina stepped in, this time wearing much more conservative full-length satin pyjamas and an embarrassed face.

"I'm so sorry, Emma," she said and Emma could make out a large blush spread across her face, "you're going to need a vacation to get over your vacation if I keep interrupting your sleep."

"Interrupt my sleep all you like," Emma grinned and Regina ducked her head in further embarrassment but this time she smiled.

“Drink?” Emma offered as she pointed to the now twice boiled kettle triumphantly.

“Tea, please,” Regina nodded and folded her arms uncertainly.

Emma set about making two drinks and could see Regina’s indecision in the mirror in front of her, “I know it’s not proper but I’d like to drink this in bed, much more comfortable but if you want to sit on the sofa that’s fine too.”

Regina seemed to look at the bed longingly and Emma smiled as she clarified, “if you don’t mind sitting in bed with me, that is?”

“I’d like that,” Regina admitted.

Emma smiled to herself, she wanted to try to further their relationship at a better pace. They seemed to go from casual glances and the occasional gentle touch to full blown make out sessions, usually at Regina’s command. Then it had dawned on Emma, Regina had never dated. She had no frame of reference for how any of this worked, she’d been forced into marriage and hardly knew her husband before they were forced to be intimate.

Regina had said she had feelings she didn’t understand, made reference to processing emotions and Emma realised that Regina was caught in an awkward situation, while she felt sexually aroused she wasn’t ready for intimacy on that level. And that was why Emma continually detected that Regina felt slightly uncomfortable. Regina didn’t like waiting so she was tackling the issue in a typically Regina way, head on and with all the finesse of a bull in a china shop.

So it was down to Emma, she couldn’t wait for Regina to say she was ready because the brunette probably didn’t know what ready was. Emma had to work out a way to increase the physical side of their relationship in a more balanced manner so Regina didn’t feel overwhelmed. Which meant Emma was going to have to apply great self-control and hope that Regina would one day understand why and maybe even thank her for it.

“Swan,” Regina’s harsh tone floated across the bedroom and Emma turned to see the aggravated sitting up in bed and looking at the cup in Emma’s hand

pointedly, “you either need to bring it here or fetch a long straw.”

Emma jumped into action and gave Regina the hot mug before returning to finish making her own drink and then returning to the bed and sitting beside Regina and smiling at her happily.

“What now?” Regina grumbled, clearly still embarrassed and trying to deflect with her bad mood.

“We talk,” Emma said as she blew into her steamy mug of coffee.

“About?” Regina asked with a smaller voice.

“Anything,” Emma said, “you can tell me more about Greg, or something about the past or we can talk about me, or Henry, or... well, anything. This is what couple’s do, they talk.”

“We can talk about you?” Regina asked.

“Of course,” Emma laughed, “we’re not just here to talk about your problems, I have plenty of my own.”

“Okay,” Regina considered that for a moment before quickly asking, “why six years?”

Emma looked at Regina with a grin, “that was right on the tip of the tongue wasn’t it?”

Regina shrugged, “fine, what’s your favourite colour?”

“I’ve been in Storybrooke for nearly two years and been a bit busy, you know, slaying dragons, breaking curses that kinda thing,” Emma explained, “before that I was in bail bonds work for three years and that really cuts into your personal time. Didn’t meet anyone I wanted to take it further with, went on a few dates but nothing serious.”

Regina nodded her understanding and Emma continued, “before that, well, I was a little wild I suppose you could say. I’d just moved to another area of

the city and I was pretty near the gay scene and... well, I had fun," she grinned and Regina felt her breath quicken at the admission, "a lot of fun."

"But I..." Emma sighed and suddenly turned serious as if she had decided to share more than she originally intended, "I realised I was using sex as a way to make myself feel wanted and it was doing the exact opposite. I was having a lot of meaningless relationships, a lot of fun but it never lasted and so I stopped. I moved again, got myself away from that crowd and decided not to allow myself to do that again, it wasn't fair on me and it wasn't fair on the people I slept with."

"And there's been no one since?" Regina asked.

"No one serious," Emma said as she took a sip of her drink.

Regina stared ahead as she processed that information and Emma could practically hear the cogs turning in her brain. When Regina stiffened slightly and unconsciously held her breath Emma grinned, "go on, what do you want to ask?"

"How many is a lot of fun?" Regina asked.

Emma hesitated briefly before Regina clarified, "I'm not going to judge you, I'm just curious, you don't have to answer."

"I'm not going to give you an exact number," Emma said, "but we'll say more than thirty."

Regina nearly choked on her tea and Emma silently congratulated herself on choosing a lower number than what she first considered going for.

"That's a lot of fun..." Regina allowed with an impressed tilt of the head.

"I was in a bad place," Emma said, "I was looking for love and acceptance in completely the wrong place," she paused, "this doesn't make you think any less of me does it?"

"No," Regina said quickly, "absolutely not."

“I’m not proud of it,” Emma added.

“You don’t need to justify yourself to me,” Regina replied, “you certainly made up for it with a six year hiatus.”

“Yeah, that’s me, all or nothing,” Emma joked.

Regina smiled half-heartedly as she stared into the distance and Emma knew she was lost in thought. After a long period of silence Emma finally asked, “what are you thinking about?”

“Leopold,” Regina said quietly.

Emma felt a shiver at his very name but remained quiet and hugged her mug to her chest.

“I was a virgin, obviously,” Regina said quietly, “my mother did nothing to prepare me for what was going to happen.”

“Your mother was a class A bitch,” Emma said without thinking and then spun her head to Regina, “sorry, that slipped out, I shouldn’t say things like that...”

Regina chuckled, “no, you’re right, that’s exactly what she was. I sometimes wonder, if she had lived, would we have been able to fix our relationship. She told me that I would have been enough. And, at first that made the pain so much worse, I agonised for the longest time thinking that I should have tried harder to reconcile with her.”

“I didn’t know her like you did but I think she was too far gone,” Emma said sadly.

“Quite probably,” Regina allowed, “but, from my own perspective, even if she had managed to change her ways I don’t think I could ever forgive her for what she did to me.”

Emma nodded, “for killing Daniel.”

“No,” Regina shook her head sadly and tears fell from her eyes as she scrunched them up at the pain of what she was about to say, “we’ll never know what might have been. And I loved Daniel with all of my young, untouched heart but over the years I have wondered if life would have been as perfect as I fantasised.”

She put the mug down on the bedside table and curled her legs under her body as she turned towards Emma, “I’d never been in love before, hell I’d never had a friend before. Who’s to say that six months down the line we wouldn’t have realised we wanted different things? As much as it tears at my soul to admit it, no matter how much I loved Daniel, I was too young and naïve to really know if he was my true love.”

Emma put her mug down on her own bedside table and positioned herself so Regina could cuddle into her chest.

“Of course that doesn’t mean that I don’t still loathe my mother for taking his life and your mother for being initiating the whole sorry affair,” Regina said as she settled into Emma’s embrace.

“But,” Regina’s breath hitched, “the thing I could absolutely never forgive my mother for was making me marry Leopold.”

“I hate that you had to go through that,” Emma admitted, “I wanna claw at my skin when I think I share some small amount of DNA with that man. But no matter how shitty those experiences made you who you are today and they brought you to me. I would never, ever want you to suffer but I can appreciate the positive that eventually comes from harsh times.”

Regina looked up at Emma’s face, “I hate that I cast the curse that forced your parents to do what they did, to leave you abandoned and feeling unloved for so long. I look at you and I feel guilty,” she admitted.

Emma smiled, “but don’t you see? The same applies, without those experiences I wouldn’t be who I am. I wouldn’t have met Neal, I wouldn’t have had Henry, I wouldn’t have come to Storybrooke and I wouldn’t have met you.”

“No, you’d be a princess in your mother’s kingdom, unless of course I managed to kill you which is entirely likely,” Regina noted.

“See? Despite everything we are what we are and I wouldn’t change it,” Emma said softly as she looked down at Regina’s face. A moment later she closed the gap between them and pressed her lips gently against Regina’s.

The innocent kiss quickly turned into another and another and Regina reached her hand up to cup Emma’s cheek and Emma revelled in the feeling while trying to keep her emotions in check in order to ensure they didn’t stray too far. They stayed like that for some time, lost in each other’s arms, sharing soft kisses filled with promise as they gently touched each other’s face.

After what seemed like days Regina pulled away with a sad smile, “I should get back, and let you get some sleep.”

Emma nodded, not wanting it to end but knowing it had to, “see you at breakfast?”

Regina leaned in for another kiss, “absolutely,” she said as she pulled away and climbed off of the bed, “sweet dream, enjoy your flying.”

Chapter 67

Emma strolled around the hotel with a sigh. She'd been everywhere she could think of to try to entertain herself, the gift shop, the games room, the gym, the pool restaurant but nothing held her interest for more than a moment. She looked at her watch and sighed, it had only been an hour since Regina and Henry had left the hotel in the hire car and already she was stumped for things to do.

Regina hadn't given her any further clues as to what she was intending to do and Emma had done her best to appear casual and disinteresting and stated that she'd entertain herself until they returned. The second Emma had waved them off in the car park she had wanted to jump in a taxi and follow them to see what they were doing, not that she didn't trust Regina but because her curiosity was sky-high.

So she had taken to aimlessly meandering the hotel in an effort to find something to occupy her mind.

"Hello again," a male voice sounded as she walked along an outdoor terrace, she turned to see Todd and attempted to keep a neutral face.

"Hi," she gave a small smile.

"No swimming today?" Todd asked with a warm smile, oblivious of Emma's defensive stance.

"Maybe later," Emma said, "Henry is out with Regina at the moment."

"He's a great kid," Todd said, "and you're his hero, he didn't stop talking about you when we were watching Gremlins last night."

"Oh?" Emma was surprised, of course she knew that Henry loved her and enjoyed spending time with her but she hadn't expected him to talk about her in those terms.

“Yeah, he said that you were his birth mother but you’ve only recently reconnected?”

At Emma’s nod he continued, “yeah, he couldn’t stop saying how awesome you are, and apparently you’re going to take him paragliding?”

Emma winced, “don’t let Regina hear that, she’s a bit of a safety junkie.”

Todd laughed lightly, “it’s safe, Henry’ll love it.”

Emma smiled, “you know that and I know that but Regina... where Henry is concerned, likes his feet on the ground.”

“That’s only natural, he’s a really great kid,” Todd smiled, “I hope if me and Stew ever have kids they’ll talk about me like Henry talks about you!”

Emma felt herself blush and she began to see what Regina liked about Todd, he was sweet and kind, “I’m sure they will,” Emma nodded.

“So, you’re on your own this morning?” Todd asked as they started to walk along the terrace.

“Yes, they’ve gone out,” Emma said with a shrug, “I wasn’t invited.”

Todd laughed, “maybe they’re getting something for you?”

Emma looked up at him with shock as it hadn’t even entered her mind with everything that had been going on recently, “it’s my birthday in a couple of days’ time.”

“Well there you go,” Todd grinned, “they’re getting you a present or a cake or something!”

“I completely forgot,” Emma said in shock, “can’t believe I forgot my own birthday.”

“You should let your server know if you go out for dinner at one of the hotel restaurants, you’ll get a free bottle of wine,” Todd told her.

Emma was about to reply but suddenly she felt her body pitch forward as her shoes skidded on the patch of water that had gathered on the marble floor.

An hour later Regina and Henry were walking up the hotel corridor towards their room and Henry was pleading for another afternoon at the beach.

“We’ll see,” Regina smiled.

“Please, Mom,” he whined again.

Regina laughed, “Henry, you’re too old to whine line that,” she said as she inserted the keycard into the door and opened the door.

She noticed Henry looking into the room with an open mouth and was about to ask him what was wrong when she looked up and saw Todd standing by the interconnecting door looking at her in a panic.

“Miss Mills!”

Regina took a small step in front of Henry and glared at the man, “why are you in my room?”

“She fell,” he said and quickly beckoned Regina into Emma’s room.

“Stay here,” Regina ordered Henry in such a tone that he didn’t move a muscle as she marched into the adjoining room.

Sitting on the sofa with a big blue ice patch held to her forehead was Emma, “hey,” she smiled weakly, “I kept myself entertained.”

Any anger about Todd being in her room vanished as Regina looked at Emma and blinked, “what... what happened?”

Todd was stood beside Emma wringing his hands, “she slipped and hit her head, it was totally my fault.”

“It wasn’t your fault,” Emma looked up at him and winced as the movement of her eyes caused a pain in her head.

“She won’t go to the hospital to get checked out,” Todd told Regina as if hoping the older woman would force the blonde.

Regina sat on the coffee table in front of Emma and gently reached up to move the ice patch so she could see the injury. She breathed in sharply when she saw a large yellow and purple bruise as well as some swelling, “Emma, you should go to see a doctor about this.”

“I’m fine,” Emma said as she pulled the ice patch back to cover the wound.

“Mom?” Henry called out from the other room.

“You can come in, Henry,” Regina called over her shoulder and a moment later Henry burst into the room.

“Whoa, what happened?” Henry said to Emma with a frown.

“Wet floor plus me equals this,” Emma said as she momentarily showed him the bruise.

“Cool,” Henry said with a fascinated smile.

“No, not cool,” Regina said with annoyance, “Emma...”

“Regina, I’m fine, it looks really bad but I’m okay, Todd helped me to the room and got me this ice pack. I just need the swelling to go down and then I’ll be fine,” Emma said with a smile that was supposed to placate the brunette.

“You may have a concussion,” Regina said as she attempted to look into green eyes.

Emma turned her head slightly to pull away from the scrutiny.

“I feel terrible,” Todd said, “I shouldn’t have distracted you with my babbling.”

Emma laughed, “I’m clumsy, I would have done it anyway, at least you were there to pick me up off of the floor!”

“What is your name?” Henry asked as he looked at the screen on his mobile phone.

“Not now, Henry,” Emma rolled her eyes and winced again.

“Can you tell me what day it is?” Henry continued.

“Henry,” Regina warned as she put a comforting arm on Emma’s and attempted to examine the blonde.

“I’ll happily take you to the local emergency room,” Todd said, “it’s not far away.”

“Okay, everyone stand down,” Emma announced, “I’m clumsy, I hurt myself all the time. If I had a dollar for every time I hit my head I’d probably have a hundred bucks by now. I know the signs of concussion and what to look for, I’ve even recently had a concussion,” she looked meaningfully at Regina, “and I know what the doctor would say. So I would just like to chill out, help the swelling with this ice patch and then if I don’t feel right I will go to the doctor, okay?”

Vague murmurs and nods of agreement filled the room and Todd approached the desk and jotted down a number before handing it to Regina, “this is my cell, if you need anything then please call me.”

Regina took it and smiled gratefully, “thank you so much for helping her.”

Todd nodded and apologised again to Emma before hurrying out of the room, after he had left Emma looked at Regina, “totally wasn’t his fault.”

“I’m sure it wasn’t,” Regina agreed before looking at Henry, “sorry Henry, no beach this afternoon.”

Henry nodded his understand, “it’s cool, I can play my game or something.”

“You don’t need to cancel your plans because of me, I can chill in my room,” Emma argued.

“I’m not leaving you,” Regina said firmly, “someone needs to keep an eye on you.”

“I feel bad that Henry has to be cooped up,” Emma admitted.

“Henry, would you like to go to kid’s club for the afternoon? I can watch Emma,” Regina suggested.

Henry’s face lit up, “as long as you’re both cool with that?”

“Absolutely, I want you to go and have fun, it’s your vacation too,” Emma smiled.

Henry looked at Regina for confirmation and she nodded, “go and get the schedule and we’ll see what they’re doing this afternoon.”

Henry rushed back into the other room to pick up the folder and Regina looked at Emma, “can’t leave you for two seconds.”

Emma grinned, “I am high maintenance.”

Chapter 68

When Regina returned to Emma's room half an hour later she placed a takeout bag down on the table and sat on the sofa beside Emma, "Henry is signed into kid's club, he'll be back with us around dinner time."

Emma nodded as she eyed the takeout bag, "is that?"

"Lunch, yes," Regina nodded but placed a gentle, restraining hand on Emma's arm, "which you can have once you allow me to get a proper look at that bruise."

"It's a grilled cheese," Emma said as she looked at the bag, "I can smell it."

"You're quite right," Regina smiled.

"You have to eat it straight away or it won't be as good," Emma told her seriously.

"Then you better hurry up and let me have a look at that bruise," Regina laughed.

Emma sighed dramatically and lowered the ice patch from her head and turned to face Regina with her eyes looking up at the ceiling in petulance. Regina quickly sat forward and took hold of Emma's chin to hold her head still as she examined the bruise.

"Look at me," Regina gently commanded and when Emma did she saw worried brown eyes staring into her own eyes carefully.

After a while Regina nodded, "I don't believe you have a concussion."

"Yay," Emma cheered quietly, "grilled cheese now?"

Regina rolled her eyes, "very well."

Emma quickly pitched forward and grabbed the bag and opened it up and pulled out the freshly toasted sandwich, unwrapping it she looked at Regina with a curious glance, “are you not eating?”

“I’m not hungry,” Regina commented lightly.

“Its lunchtime,” Emma frowned.

Regina laughed, “I ate while we were out.”

“Getting my birthday present,” Emma grinned as she took a smug bite of her sandwich.

“Oh, you finally remembered your own birthday?” Regina looked at her in mock surprise.

“Yup,” she grinned, “what did you get me?”

“That grilled cheese sandwich, savour it,” Regina quipped, “you shouldn’t be expecting anything considering you’ve told Henry you’ll take him sky diving.”

“Parasailing,” Emma corrected before realising her mistake, “I mean, I don’t know what you mean,” she grinned and then put her hand to her forehead delicately, “maybe I do have concussion after all.”

“You’ll have more than a concussion if you attach my son to a piece of string and send him up into space, tethered to a speedboat driven by immature boys,” Regina warned.

“I’m so glad you fully researched it before you shot it down in flames,” Emma rolled her eyes, “besides I wouldn’t send him up on his own, it would be a tandem thing.”

And there it was. The Evil Queen glare of fury, Regina stood up and looked down at Emma with one hand on her hip and the other pointing a finger at the blonde, “I won’t allow it! I will not have the two most important people in my life putting themselves in mortal peril!”

Emma looked at Regina in all her rage. Lip curled, forehead vein throbbing, teeth bared, finger pointing, muscles tense and she smiled.

“Okay,” she said with a small shrug as she took another bite of her sandwich.

Regina faltered, “okay? Okay? What do you mean okay?!”

Emma swallowed her food, “okay we won’t go, it’s fine.”

Regina lowered her finger and stood down from her defensive pose and looked embarrassed, “I see,” she said simply.

Emma smiled at her and then continued eating her lunch, she hadn’t realised the parasailing would be such a big deal to Regina but as soon as she knew it was she was happy to cancel the whole thing, Henry would understand. And the fact that Regina had classed her as one of the two most important people in her life hadn’t been missed by Emma but she wasn’t about to bring it up and gloat. Regina knew what she had said, she didn’t need Emma to be making a big deal about it.

“Headache?” Emma enquired casually.

Regina sat back on the sofa, suddenly feeling ridiculous for towering over a pacified woman eating a cheese sandwich, “a minor one,” she admitted.

“Nightmares last night?” Emma savoured the last bite of her sandwich before wiping her greasy fingers on a napkin.

“Yes,” Regina disclosed quietly.

“Wanna talk about it?” Emma asked, not making eye contact with Regina in an attempt to keep it light.

“It was about Greg, again,” she conceded, “I don’t see the point in going over old ground.”

“Dreams are our way of processing things, what you went through was pretty severe and it will take a while for you to get over it,” Emma said as

she picked up her ice patch and gently held it back up to her throbbing head.

Regina stared at the empty takeout bag silently and Emma tried again, “talking will help you come to terms with it, even if you just end up repeating yourself, I don’t mind.”

“I think it’s a bit rich me talking about my problems while you have a serious injury,” Regina looked at Emma and indicated the ice patch.

“It’s not serious, I slipped and it looks worse than it is,” Emma said with a smile, “do you have nightmares every night?”

Regina looked at the bag again as she debated whether or not she wanted to discuss the matter, “most nights,” she eventually conceded.

“I...” Emma hesitated, she didn’t want another reappearance of the Evil Queen, “I’ve been reading about something that might help.”

“Is this going to be some psych-analysis claptrap?” Regina raised an eyebrow.

“Yeah,” Emma nodded, “but it might work?”

Regina sighed, “what is it?”

“It’s called imagery rehearsal treatment,” Emma turned to face Regina and tucked her legs under her body, “you try to come up with an alternative ending to your nightmare while you’re still awake, so you think about what would make it better. You can either talk about it or write it down and then that can sometimes encourage your subconscious to kick in and help you take control of the dream.”

Regina looked at her for a long time before shaking her head, “and that’s supposed to work?”

“Worth a try,” Emma smiled.

“And what alternative ending do I imagine?” Regina scoffed.

“That’s up to you,” Emma said, “depends on your nightmares.”

“Well I’m essentially strapped to a gurney being electrocuted to death,” Regina explained sarcastically.

“So it’s just like in reality?” Emma asked.

“Yes, exactly the same,” Regina said and bristled at the thought, “which makes it all the more terrifying, my worst nightmare isn’t some terrible monster or some horrifying sequence of events, it’s something that actually happened.”

The silence hung in the air for a few moments, Emma turning the sentence over and over in her mind until she felt she had something worth saying, “well, it’s a dream, right? And anything can happen in a dream, the more outlandish and bizarre the more likely you’ll remember it in your dream, right?”

“I suppose,” Regina allowed.

Emma held out her hands and Regina tentatively took them, “close your eyes,” Emma said softly.

Regina looked at her in defiance, “come on, you said you trusted me, now close your eyes.”

Regina took a deep breath and pursed her lips before slowly closing her eyes.

“Okay, picture your nightmare,” Emma squeezed Regina’s hands comfortingly, “you’re there on the table, strapped down and Greg is there.”

“Emma,” Regina warned.

“Trust me,” Emma said, “picture it...”

A few moments passed and Emma could feel Regina’s grip on her hands tighten ever so slightly so she continued, “so he’s all big and mighty and like I’m gonna kill you and then suddenly the machine turns to custard.”

“Custard?” Regina’s eyes flew open.

“Focus,” Emma admonished her, “close your eyes, think of custard.”

Regina’s eyes fluttered closed and a hint of a smile graced her face as Emma continued, “so he’s about to push a button but oh-no, custard, it’s dripping everywhere and he’s all confused and like ‘hey what’s with the custard’ and you’re just laughing because, well, it’s turned to custard. And then there’s an earthquake and the building starts shaking and he falls over into the custard and he can’t stand up, dude is like Bambi on ice slipping and sliding in the custard.”

Emma opened her eyes to look at Regina and smiled that the brunette still had her eyes closed and was smiling at the thought, “and then the earthquake shakes loose your restraints and you’re free and then all the walls fall apart and you’re in the air, like standing on the floor but it’s floating the sky and it’s still shaking and you’re fine but custard boy is about to fall off the edge,” Emma said excitedly.

“And then there’s me in my plane, it’s red by the way, and just as the floor gives way I fly underneath and you fall into the co-pilots seat. Then Greg falls and gets mashed in the propellers,” Emma added with a satisfied nod.

Regina opened her eyes and smiled softly at Emma, “that is absolutely ridiculous.”

“I know,” Emma grinned, “that’s why it might work, just keep thinking it and maybe the next time you dream about him you’ll think of custard.”

Regina pulled Emma forward gently by their joined hands and pulled her softly into a kiss, “thank you,” she whispered when she leaned back.

“Thank me again,” Emma requested and closed her eyes and waited for Regina’s lips to meet hers again.

Chapter 69

“So, what did you guys do while I was at kid’s club?” Henry asked casually across the table. He’d been talking happily about his afternoon of activities on the beach and noticed that his mothers were only half engaged in the conversation, more interested in making eyes at one another. His suspicions were confirmed where both flushed red at his question and a grin spread across his face, “never mind,” he laughed.

“We just talked,” Emma shrugged in an attempt at nonchalance that was not working too well with a wide grin on her face and blushed cheeks.

“I was looking after Emma,” Regina announced firmly as she hacked into her dinner with her steak knife held a little too tightly.

Henry saw his opportunity to get more soda and held up his refillable glass, “can I get another drink?”

“Only half,” Regina answered and he smiled happily and walked over to the self-service machine.

The second he was gone Emma giggled and Regina looked at her with a face like thunder, “I fail to see what is so amusing.”

“We’re busted by an eleven-year-old,” Emma shrugged, “it’s funny.”

Regina looked scandalised, “keep your voice down.”

“Oh, come on,” Emma laughed as she pushed her empty plate to the side, “we spent the afternoon making out not burying bodies.”

If it was possible, Regina blushed further and Emma wondered if steam would soon start flowing out of her ears to release some of the pressure, “Henry doesn’t know that, he might... he...” she leaned closer and whispered, “he might think we were... you know...”

“You know?” Emma couldn’t help but let out a snigger but then wiped the smile off of her face and held a hand up in apology at Regina’s expression, “look, Regina, the kid isn’t stupid. He reads books, watches movies and TV, he know about sex to some degree. If he does think that we were having sex all afternoon and his reaction is a grin and asking for a refill then I think we can relax.”

Regina looked like she was about to argue and Emma continued, “unless you want to clarify so he doesn’t get the wrong idea? We can tell him that we didn’t frickle frackle, as the kids call it these days. We explain to him that we spent the afternoon kissing, you can tell him about your exploration of my boobs if you like, you know, just so he knows we didn’t have sex because that would be terrible.”

Henry sat down and placed his half full glass on the table and looked from Regina to Emma and then back to Regina, “erm, I’m gonna use the restroom,” he said and slipped away from the table again quickly.

Regina glared at Emma darkly, “if you ever say frickle frackle again, we’re over.”

Emma bit her lip to keep from smiling at the phrase falling from Regina’s lips like it was a curse.

“And we will not be telling Henry anything, at all,” Regina announced firmly, “in fact we should be more careful...”

“Hold up there,” Emma shook her head, “no, hear me out...”

Regina looked at Emma in shock that she had just been interrupted in the middle of an order.

“Henry,” Emma said firmly, “is a mature, loving kid. Despite living in a fairy tale town all of his life he has managed to turn out well, he isn’t naïve, he understands the real world and we have you to thank for that. He knows about sex and relationships, he may be eleven but he hasn’t lived under a rock all his life. I don’t want to be shady when it comes to sex and relationships, I don’t want him to think there is anything wrong with making

love to the right person and I definitely don't want him to think he can't talk to us about sex."

Regina's eyes flickered down to her plate as she began to understand Emma's point.

"Of course I'm not going to go into any details, we don't want therapy bills until he's forty but I'm not going to pretend we're not having a physical relationship. He seems fine with it so let's just be grateful of that," Emma said finally.

With a nod Regina agreed with Emma and yet again Regina realised that this woman wasn't afraid to stand up to her when it needed to happen and she found she was strangely grateful for that. In her previous relationships the power had always been one way, in the first part of her life she was powerless and in the latter part she wielded the power like a protective cloak deciding to strike first to assert her control. Emma was different, she fought when she had to and Regina was left in no doubt that she would fight loudly for something she believed in but she also knew when to give up and allow Regina the authority.

"Is everything okay?" Henry asked tentatively as he returned to the eerily quiet table and looked at the two women both deep in thought, "Mom had her scary face on."

Regina smiled comfortingly despite a minor eye roll at the mention of her supposedly scary face, "everything is fine, Henry."

"Sorry, Kid," Emma said and gave him a warm smile as well.

Henry looked at them both again in an attempt to assure himself that all was well and then finally nodded as he played with the straw in his drink, "Mom, can we go back to that frozen yoghurt place soon?"

Emma looked up with interest, "I love frozen yoghurt, where was that?"

"Just up by the..." Henry started but stopped when Regina coughed loudly.

“It was nearby,” Regina finished with a meaningful look at Henry, “we can all go tomorrow?”

“Awesome,” Henry smiled, “can I go to the games room?”

Emma looked at Regina who slowly nodded and Emma handed Henry some money from her pocket, “we’ll be out on the terrace,” she told him as he left.

“Oh will we?” Regina smiled.

“Yeah, I’m going to celebrate not getting a concussion,” Emma nodded with a mock serious expression.

An hour later they sat on an upholstered wicker sofa looking at the lit-up pool below them and the beach in the distance as they sipped their cocktails.

“She didn’t!” Emma stared wide-eyed and scandalised.

“She did,” Regina nodded slowly, “she had such a hissy fit she tore several of her best gowns before I managed to stop her.”

“Wow,” Emma shook her head, “I thought Snow White was supposed to be pure of heart.”

“She could be an evil beast when she was a child,” Regina said, “not that Leopold ever saw that.”

“Was she a daddy’s girl?” Emma asked with a roll of her eyes.

“She was,” Regina agreed, “but then so was I so I suppose I empathised with her somewhat.”

“You were close to your father?”

“I idolised him,” Regina admitted with a small smile, “he was everything to me... but I don’t wish to talk about him, not now.”

Emma nodded and looked out towards the sea and the moonlight twinkling on the waves, “I know what you had to do in order to cast the curse, I figured it out.”

Regina stilled and Emma wondered if she had taken a step too far, “I don’t recognise the woman who did that,” Regina admitted quietly, “not that that is an excuse.”

“We all change,” Emma said as she stirred her blue and green coloured drink, “when I look back at my life and think about what I was like, I can’t recognise myself. But at the time I was so sure of myself, so certain that I knew exactly who I was and what I was doing and that I was right. But now I look back and I just see someone else.”

Regina looked at Emma thoughtfully, “so you really believe that people can change?”

“Absolutely, we all evolve and grow, we adapt to our surroundings,” Emma answered honestly.

“But do you think that some personality traits will always remain?” Regina asked.

“Well, yeah,” Emma allowed with a small nod, “people rarely do a one eighty and turn into someone else entirely, parts of their personality will always be there but it doesn’t mean that always defines them.”

“So the biggest part of them will always remain, even if it shrinks?” Regina phrased the question like a statement and Emma knew the point she was trying to make.

“Yes,” Emma said, “like you, people called you evil, but if you really think about it the things you did were not created out of an evil persona. You weren’t pure evil...”

“I think some would disagree with you there, dear,” Regina laughed as she drank her cocktail with a shake of the head.

“Then they’re wrong, you did bad things, some terrible things, I get that. I’m not living in a bubble, I know some of the things you did. But I also know you didn’t do them because you’re pure evil. You did them because of lots of parts of your personality came together, you may not want me to say this but fear played a big part in it. You may not want anyone to think that you are ever scared of anything or anyone but Regina, I met your mother, and I saw you with her. That woman controlled your life through fear. Then there’s passion, you love with your whole heart, you love so much it could break you in two. I see how you are with Henry and I can hardly imagine how you must have felt after Daniel died. These things on their own aren’t terrible, horrific personality traits, they are a part of you but it was circumstance, timing and the influence of others who made you do the things you did,” Emma said firmly.

“Your parents would say you’ve been manipulated,” Regina suggested lightly.

“I don’t think they would but if they did, I would tell them that they are wrong,” Emma laughed lightly as she looked down at the pool and watched the staff tidying the sun loungers for the next day.

“They might say that you are under a spell,” Regina insinuated.

“You can’t make someone love someone,” Emma said.

After a few seconds of Regina’s silence Emma realised what she said and looked at Regina who was staring at her, “yeah,” Emma nodded, “I did say that.”

Chapter 70

“Regina, say something,” Emma pleaded.

Regina had simply sat staring at her in silence since Emma had accidentally spilled the depths of her feelings for the brunette.

“I love you too,” Regina mumbled quietly, though the simple words were filled with emotion.

Emma let out the breath she had been holding and giggled, “God, you scared me then.”

Regina smiled as she shook her head to wake herself up from the daze created by the unexpected revelations, “I’m sorry. But I didn’t realise you felt that way about me, you surprised me...”

“I’ve felt like this for a while but I didn’t want to scare you,” Emma admitted with a small, shy smile.

Regina laughed, “I’ve known my own feelings for a quite a while,” she looked at Emma and let out a small breath, “so, what now?”

Emma shrugged, “whatever we like, this doesn’t have to change anything, we can just carry on as we were, set our own pace. It doesn’t mean we have to follow certain rules...”

Regina nodded and Emma thought that she noticed a weight lift from the brunette’s shoulders. She supposed that admitting love had never been a positive experience in Regina’s history.

“What are you drinking?” Henry’s voice sounded from behind them and Emma turned around to show him her blue and green drink, “it’s called a blue booty.”

Henry rolled his eyes at the ridiculous name and looked at Regina questioningly.

“A long island iced tea,” Regina said as she showed him the glass.

“What are we doing now?” Henry asked as he flopped down in between them on the sofa.

Regina looked at her watch, “well, there is time for a little television before bed if you would like?”

Two hours later and Henry was asleep, slumped against Regina where they had both been watching television while laying on Henry’s bed. Emma had been catching up on her emails and general browsing the Internet on her laptop at the desk and turned around with a smile, “he’s asleep,” she told Regina in a whisper.

“He’s been asleep for a while,” Regina admitted, “I was just enjoying the moment, it’s been a while since we’ve cuddled like this. He’s getting too big for such things.”

“Yeah,” Emma nodded woefully, “isn’t there some spell you can cast on him to stop him aging?”

Regina chuckled lightly, “you want to be stuck with him this after forever?”

Emma turned her nose up at that idea and shook her head, “no, maybe not, just stop him from growing, he’s getting too tall!”

“Now that I will look into,” Regina agreed, “he’s already surpassed me when I’m barefooted.”

Emma smiled and closed the lid of her laptop, “I’m going to...” she thumbed in the direction of her own room, “unless you wanna talk?”

Regina shook her head as she softly brushed her fingers through Henry’s messy hair in an attempt to tame it, “no, after your fall I think you probably need some rest.”

“Okay, but you know where I am if you need me,” Emma said as she stood up and tucked the laptop under her arm, “and remember custard.”

Regina rolled her eyes, “yes, yes, custard, goodnight, Emma.”

Emma walked over to Regina and bent down to give her a chaste kiss, “goodnight, see you both in the morning,” she whispered.

For the next couple of hours Emma wandered about her room attempting to keep herself occupied and hoping that Regina would make one of her nightly visits. She showered and changed into some of her more revealing nightwear that she had brought with her just in case, she didn’t want Regina to catch her in an old tank top again.

After that she watched television, browsed the Internet and read a book but all activities were pointless as she continuously drifted off to daydream about the afternoon spent kissing, caressing and giggling with Regina on the sofa.

If she’d ever been a teenager who spent hours making out on her parent’s couch she would have felt like one of them, but Emma had never really done that kind of thing. She grinned and bit her lip as she remembered when Regina’s hand had casually made its way under Emma’s t-shirt and gently palmed her side.

Emma’s mantra had been slow and steady, wait for Regina to be ready before getting too hot and heavy and when Regina started to desperately look for warm flesh Emma was relieved. She’d quickly told Regina to touch her breasts and smiled when Regina didn’t need telling twice.

It hadn’t gone much further than that, Emma caressed Regina’s back through the brunette’s clothes while Regina explored under Emma’s thin t-shirt and they kissed until they were breathless. They’d pull apart and laugh but within a few moments they were swallowing hard and staring into each other’s eyes before being drawn together and kissing again.

Only when a text message sounded from Emma’s phone did they guiltily pull apart and realise the time and prepared to meet Henry for dinner.

Separating had been hard, sweet kisses and hand holding had kept them together until they were hurriedly rushing to get ready to leave and pick Henry up from the kid's club.

Emma had intentionally let slip her feelings, knowing that if she were rejected in some way she could always rely on the excuse of two glasses of wine and a cocktail but the truth was she was completely unaffected by the alcohol. She had wanted to tell Regina that she loved her for a while but she didn't know how Regina would react, especially considering their difficult relationship up until that time. Not to mention the relatively short time they had been together.

Love was something Emma thought she understood right up until the time she'd actually fallen in love with Regina. All-consuming, terrifying, exhilarating and enough to make her question her existence up until that point. Emma had never thought that love would feel the way it did, she had been blindsided by it one morning when she woke up. Discovering that her thought process had somehow changed, her brain was now wired differently and her priorities had transformed her into a new person.

The last thing Emma wanted to do was to scare Regina with that information so she had attempted to act normally even though she couldn't stop smiling and thinking about how happy Regina made her. She was sure that Regina thought she was dating some simply lunatic who couldn't stop grinning for no apparent reason. But somehow she had done the impossible, she had convinced Regina Mills to love her.

Emma found herself staring at the door handle of the interconnecting door as she willed it to open, wished that Regina would step through and they could just be together without the infernal wall that kept them apart at night.

A gentle knocking on the door was what woke Emma the next morning and she realised she must have fallen asleep sat up in the spare bed in her room with a book in her lap as she waited for someone who never arrived. She tentatively turned her head and winced at the loud cracks that were released from her neck being forced to sit uncomfortably all night.

Suddenly realising that she was still wearing her lacy underwear she quickly got up and threw a robe on in case it was Henry who was knocking and called out that she would be there in a minute.

Throwing the door open she was a fully-dressed Regina regarding her with a raised eyebrow, “sleep in?”

“Sort of,” Emma said with a smile.

Regina turned around to look at Henry, “Henry, could you go downstairs and get us a table for breakfast, Emma’s not quite ready to leave yet but we’ll meet you there.”

“Sure,” Henry said without looking up from the game he was playing on his phone.

Regina watched him leave and the second he was gone she turned and stared at Emma with naked desire in her dark eyes, she stepped straight into Emma’s personal space and brought her mouth to Emma’s.

Emma was still half asleep and desperately tried to wake up her mind and body to react in some way to Regina’s tongue in her mouth and hands that dipped straight inside her robe and seductively rubbed over the lace material they found.

Pulling back Emma smiled at Regina, “good morning...”

“Yes, it is,” Regina agreed as she looked down at Emma’s clothing which was now clearly visible under the open robe.

“Not that I don’t love this kind of wake up call, is there a particular reason for it?” Emma asked as she pulled her robe together in an attempt to snap Regina out of her haze.

“Custard,” Regina said simply with a smile.

“Custard?” Emma took a while to put the pieces together, “oh, oh, custard! Custard? It worked?”

Regina nodded, “yes, I took control of my dream, it was invigorating. But then something else happened.”

Emma stared at Regina and waited for her to continue and Regina took a couple of steps forward that forced Emma to take a couple of steps backwards until the backs of her legs came up against the spare bed.

Regina stood close so her body was flushed against Emma’s as she explained, “after Mister Mendell was shredding by the propellers of your red plane you landed and we... celebrated my rescue.”

Emma swallowed, “y-yeah?”

“Yes,” Regina looked at Emma’s lips hungrily, “you took me to bed.”

“Did I?” Emma suddenly knew what the roast swan at Regina’s banquet would have felt like.

“Yes, and now I want you to do something for me,” Regina said with a smirk.

“O-okay?” Emma asked, wishing her brain would wake up and kick in so she could react in a way that didn’t make her look quite so pathetic.

“I need you to help me to convince Henry to spent the entire afternoon with the kid’s club, after we have been out for frozen yoghurt, of course” Regina said silkily, “you see, Miss Swan,” Regina placed her fingers under Emma’s chin and raised her face so they made eye contact, “the dream had quite the effect on me and I want satisfaction and I’m not going to take no for an answer, do you understand me?”

Emma nodded, “I-I’ll get dressed!”

“Good girl,” Regina smiled as she stepped back to allow Emma her freedom and then watched with a smile as the blonde raced around her room grabbing the first items of clothing she could find.

Chapter 71

Regina had eventually left Emma in peace when she realised that her watching the blonde getting ready was probably going to result in Emma suffering another head injury as she rushed around the room.

Once Regina left and Emma jumped into a cold shower she began to wake up and realised that it was actually happening. She quickly shaved everything that needed to be shaved and gave herself a once over in the bathroom mirror once she had exited the shower, she frowned as she looked at her naked body and hoped that Regina would be satisfied with what she saw.

Skidding to a halt by the drawer where she had put her underwear she reached into the back of the drawer, past the day to day panties and bras, and picked out the good stuff. White lace, she had a feeling that Regina would have a thing for the pure and innocent look probably thriving on the idea of corrupting her. Although Emma doubted there was much left to corrupt as she threw on a small pair on denim shorts that she knew made her backside look amazing. A simple white, yet tight, tank top and she knew she looked just the right amount of casual. Slipping on her Converse she grabbed her keycard and her phone and ran out of the room.

Emma looked at her watch as she ran towards the pool area, she knew she didn't have much time before Regina began to wonder where she was and the last thing she wanted was to annoy the brunette. At the pool she quickly scanned the area with a sigh before rushing indoors and going the kid's club meeting room where she looked through the glass door before shaking her head.

Racing around the communal areas of the hotel she suddenly saw who she was looking for pushing a trolley full of towels towards the laundry.

“Todd!” Emma called out.

Todd turned around and frowned in confusion, “morning, er, can I get something for you?”

“Yes, I need your help,” Emma said, out of breath from her running and mounting panic.

“Okay,” Todd said with the smile of a true hospitality professional.

“What’s kid’s club doing today?” Emma asked.

Todd looked up to the ceiling as he mentally tried to remember the schedule, “er, today it’s learning to surf over at the kid’s pool and then there’s painting, pottery, beach combing...”

“Great, great,” Emma said as she waved her hand disinterested with the full schedule, “I need you to come with me and casually bump into Henry and tell him how freaking awesome it’s going to be today, okay?”

“Er, sure,” Todd frowned, “but I just need to...”

“No, Todd,” Emma shook her head, “you need to come with me, remember when you failed to stop me from falling and getting a serious concussion yesterday?”

“B-but you said that it wasn’t my fault,” Todd looked around in panic in case a manager was in the vicinity, “and that you didn’t have a concussion...”

Emma put her hand to her still-visibly bruised forehead, “sorry, Todd, I can’t quite hear you over the constant ringing in my ears following my terrible accident I had on the premises...”

“So, kid’s club eh?” Todd smiled brightly.

“Yeah, you see, I love my son more than anything but I need to just not see nor hear from him, like, all day, can you help me with that, Todd?” Emma looked at him pointedly.

“Oh... Oh!” Todd said with sudden understanding, “yeah, sure! I gotcha!”

Over at the breakfast buffet Regina poured another cup of coffee for herself as Henry went up get yet another round of pancakes. She looked at her watch in irritation, she could only stall Henry for so long before she would

be forced to talk to him about plans for the day. She knew he wanted to spend the day with them after not seeing them much the previous day. She also knew that if Henry looked at her with those big, expressive eyes she wouldn't be able to deny him, no matter how much she wanted to spend the day alone with Emma.

Emma came rushing into the restaurant and quickly sat down opposite Regina, "hey, sorry," she said quickly as she scanned the room to see where Henry was.

"Where have you been?" Regina hissed, "how long does it take to put on so few clothes?"

Emma ignored her and turned around as Todd walked into the restaurant and made a casual yet purposeful beeline for Henry, "just called in a favour," Emma said with a grin as she poured herself some coffee.

Regina frowned as she saw Todd and Henry having an animated conversation, she was about to ask Emma what was happening when the blonde stood up and went towards the buffet herself. Too curious to be left out of the loop Regina quickly followed under the guise of getting some more fruit.

"Oh, hey, Todd," Emma said casually.

Todd nodded a good morning to Emma just as Henry looked at Emma with wide eyes, "Emma, kid's club has a surfing lesson today!"

"Cool," Emma said coolly, "maybe you could go when we get back from frozen yoghurt?"

Regina joined the group and greeted Todd as Henry sighed, "the lesson's in the morning though."

"Oh," Emma said, "well, I suppose we could go tomorrow and you could do the surfing lesson today... but then I was planning on doing some shopping and that would mean we'd have to come back this afternoon to get you."

Regina bit into an apple and watched Emma's masterful performance with a knowing shake of the head and almost wanted to applaud the blonde who was casually pouring herself some children's cereal.

Henry's face fell and Todd stepped in, "you could stay with the club in the afternoon, Henry? They're going out the beach and all kinds of cool stuff."

"I dunno, I kinda promised I'd spend today with my moms," Henry looked down at his plate which had a pancake adorned with a squirty cream smiley face looking up at him.

"What do you say moms?" Todd said looking from Emma to Regina with a big grin, "can Henry come and play with us today? I know he'll be missed, he's making lots of friends there aren't ya, buddy?"

Emma shrugged, "what do you say, Regina, happy for it to be just the two of us shopping?"

Regina looked at Henry, "absolutely, Henry, do you want to go to the room and get changed and pick up whatever you'll need for the day? Then I'll sign you into the club."

"Are you sure it's okay?" Henry looked at Regina with a guilty face at leaving her.

Regina nodded, not trusting herself to say anything in case it came out less than sincere. Henry dumped his pancake on the counter and sprinted off to go and get ready, Emma picked up the plate with interest as Regina looked at Todd, "thank you."

"Quite welcome," Todd smiled, "you ladies have fun today."

He winked as he left and Regina looked at Emma scandalised, "what did you tell him?"

"Nothing, just that I wanted Henry in kid's club today," Emma said as she carried her cereal and Henry's abandoned pancake over to the table.

"Is that your breakfast?" Regina shook her head in dismay.

“It’s the start of it,” Emma said as she ate a squirty cream eye from the top of the pancake with her finger.

Half an hour later Henry had been dropped off at kid’s club, Emma had eaten enough breakfast foods to keep an Olympic swimming team in calories for the week and the two women were walking back to the hotel room while attempt to not make eye contact or talk.

Emma began to consider that maybe Regina had gone off the idea and was now beginning to have second thoughts, she opened her room door and gestured for Regina to step inside and as she closed and locked it behind her she asked, “are you still...”

She didn’t finish her sentence as Regina grabbed her by the arm and yanked her towards the two beds, “shut up,” Regina said as she pushed some clothes and a book off of Emma’s bed.

Emma smiled at the confirmation that Regina hadn’t changed her mind and still clearly very much wanted to take the relationship to the next level. However Emma wasn’t about to let Regina call the shot too much, she knew it was only a matter of time before Regina started to feel the pressure of her inexperience.

As Regina stood up from having cleared the bed off Emma did what she had been waiting to do, she initiated an intense kiss and took Regina’s breath away. Grabbing a handful of the brunette’s white t-shirt she yanked Regina towards her and used her other hand cup the back of Regina’s head and pull her into the kiss.

Regina quickly recovered and put her hands on Emma’s sides and held her just above her hips and started to return the powerful kiss, opening her mouth like she had done the previous afternoon and sliding her tongue along Emma’s.

Emma pulled back, “if at any point you want to stop, say so and we’ll stop,” Emma said seriously, “I won’t be upset by that but I will be upset if you do something you don’t feel ready for, okay?”

Regina nodded slowly as she stared at Emma's lips and unconsciously licked her own.

"Good," Emma said as her tone lowered and she kicked off her shoes, "now I'm going to take these clothes off of you," she pulled on the t-shirt meaningfully, "and then I'm going to make you scream my name."

Regina's breath quickened at the suddenly assertive blonde in front of her and simply nodded quickly to show her willingness for exactly that to happen. Emma quickly pulled Regina to her by the belt loops on the brunette's shorts and captured her mouth again and kissed her with an intensity that had Regina struggling to keep up with.

While Emma kissed she brought her hands around the top of Regina's shorts and undid the small belt buckle and then the buttons on the shorts until they fell loosely to the ground. Mindful to not overload Regina's sense she didn't touch Regina there and instead focused on grabbing the bottom of Regina's t-shirt and pulling it up and over her head, pausing the kiss for the briefest of moments as she did so.

The second Regina's arms were free of the t-shirt she started tugging on Emma's clothes, uncoordinatedly attempting to rid the blonde of them. Emma smiled and took Regina's hands in her own and guided them to the button and zip of her shorts. Regina made quick work of undoing both and then pulling the shorts apart and assisting them over Emma's ass until they fell to the ground and pooled at her feet.

Emma removed the tank top herself to give herself a chance to see Regina in just her underwear and give Regina the opportunity to do the same. Emma stared at Regina in her red lingerie, it certainly couldn't just be referred to as underwear even if it did just consist of a bra and panties set.

"I'm sorry, I couldn't wear what I wore before under a white t-shirt," Regina started to explain as she stared hungrily at Emma's white ensemble.

"As much as I enjoyed that outfit, it just would have been more to remove," Emma said as she wrapped her arms around Regina's middle, relishing the feel of her skin. She looked at Regina and could see that the

white outfit was having the desired effect and she could see a glint in Regina's eye.

"As pretty as this is," Emma said as she held the straps of the bra loosely in her hands, "can I take it off?"

"Please," Regina breathed and Emma quickly moved her hands behind Regina's back and unhooked the bra and threaded it through Regina's arms and tossed it on the spare bed in a move that lasted around a second.

"You're overdressed," Regina said as she stared at Emma's body in appreciation.

"Do you want to take it off or do you want me to take it off?" Emma asked as she gently brushed her hands around Regina's breasts, careful to not yet touch them.

Regina stepped forward and wrapped her arms around Emma and unhooked the bra and took it off and threw it on top of her own discarded bra. She licked her lips as she looked at Emma's breasts and Emma wondered if she even knew she was doing it.

"Don't stop now," Emma said as she gently took Regina's hands and placed them on the top of her panties.

With a gulp Regina got a tighter grip on the loose material and pulled the panties down. Kneeling as she went until she was kneeling on the floor and eye level with Emma's golden curls and her hands still gripping the panties that were now around Emma's ankles.

Emma stepped out of the panties and held her hand out to help Regina back to her feet and smiled at the way Regina's eyes soak up every details of her body as they raked their way up soft, white skin.

Deciding that Regina's panties could wait a little while, Emma stepped forward and kissed Regina again as she angled the brunette and wrapped her arms around her body as she lowered her to the bed.

Regina shifted herself so she was fully laying on the bed and Emma crawled over her before lowering her naked body onto Regina's almost naked one and found herself moaning out loud at pleasure of it.

Running a hand through Regina's locks she lowered her face to kiss the breathtakingly beautiful woman below her again. She adjusted her position so that her thigh forced its way in between Regina's causing both of them to have a thigh positioned against the other's core.

Regina moaned in pleasure at the manoeuvre and looked up at Emma with passion-filled, dark eyes that Emma could get lost in. Emma ever so slowly began to roll her hips to create a gentle friction that would pleasure both of them and as she did Regina's hands went to Emma's hips and attempted to speed up the movement.

“Oh, God, Emma,” Regina said as she threw her head back and closed her eyes at the feelings coursing through her.

“Can I get these panties off?” Emma asked and Regina nodded frantically, not caring about nerves or embarrassment any longer and simply wanting a resolution to the growing pleasure she was feeling building.

Emma pushed herself off of the bed with her arms and landed on the floor beside the bed and reached forward and softly pulled the panties away from Regina's sex, which she noticed was soaking wet. Quickly divesting Regina of the last remaining item of clothing she looked at the beautiful brunette in all her naked glory, “you are exquisite,” she said as she ran her hands up Regina's legs from her ankles to her knees before parting them and laying in the space created.

“I need to taste you, can I taste you, Regina?” Emma said quickly, the ability to take the process slowly was rapidly evaporating.

“Taste?” Regina questioned and at her confused look Emma decided a practical demonstration would be quicker than a verbal explanation. She smiled reassuringly at Regina as she lowered her mouth to Regina's dark curls. She opened her mouth wide and captured the whole area before slowly

dragging her tongue up from Regina's opening all the way through wet folds to Regina's pearl.

An inarticulate mess of words spewed from Regina's mouth as her head fell back and her hands knotted quickly in blonde locks as she forcibly held Emma's head in place, never wanting the feeling to end.

It hadn't been Emma's plan to immediately go down on Regina but the second she saw the glistening folds she couldn't help herself and now she was lost in the feeling. Regina brought her knees up and clamped her thigh together and continued to hold Emma's head in place and Emma smiled at the possessive actions. She lapped at Regina like a dehydrated cat and Regina bucked and cried out above her, not that Emma could hear what was being said as her head was being crushed by Regina's strong thigh muscles.

Emma wrapped her arms around Regina's legs and waist and held the brunette still as she explored every part of Regina's sex, even dipping her tongue into Regina's entrance which brought forth a very clear swear word that even Emma heard.

Not usually one for a quick and dirty finish, Emma knew that Regina needed to come and come soon or they would both run out of oxygen, Emma from being pushed into Regina's groin and Regina from the panting.

She focused on Regina's clit, experimenting with rough, fast, slow, licks, teeth, gentle, consistent and unpredictable until she figured out what she responded to and raced for the finish line. Nail in her hair, trembling thighs beside her ears and bucking hips told Emma that Regina was about to spill over the edge and into orgasm a moment before it happened. She guided Regina through the waves of pleasure until Regina's whole body relaxed and she lay on the bed, splayed out and exhausted.

Emma sat up on her knees and wiped her mouth and chin with her hand as she looked down at Regina's still shuddering body as the brunette gasped for breath. Emma grinned, pleased that she'd obviously been able to bring Regina to a satisfactory ending.

Regina looked up at her and laughed, “wipe that smug smile off of your face.”

Emma laughed, “I’m not smug, I’m happy.”

Regina raised an eyebrow and Emma rolled her eyes, “okay, a little smug.”

“Come here,” Regina patted the bed and Emma laid down beside her. Regina turned onto her side and wrapped her body around Emma’s and kissed her, thrusting her tongue into Emma’s mouth to seek out the taste of herself.

Regina could hardly control herself and a moment later she had pushed Emma onto her back and positioned herself atop the blonde, laying her thigh in between Emma’s legs as Emma had done to her before.

The contact of Regina’s bare thigh with her soaking pussy made Emma bite her lip and close her eyes in pleasure as she held Regina tightly to her own body and started to roll her hips.

Regina knew she wasn’t strong enough to get out of Emma’s grasp and so she focused her efforts on trailing wet kisses down the blonde’s neck and chest. Emma held Regina tighter and her movements became frenzied and before long she was moaning in pleasure as she rubbed herself against Regina’s thigh.

She jerked and jolted a few times before her tight grip on Regina’s hips started to loosen, “oh, God, I’m sorry, Regina...”

Regina frowned, “why are you sorry?”

“That was pathetic,” Emma said through deep panting breaths, “I came in ten seconds from humping your leg!”

Regina chuckled as she pushed herself down Emma’s body slightly, “well, it has been six years, now that’s out of your system we can have some more

fun,” she said as she cupped Emma’s breast and wrapped her mouth around it and sucked, hard.

Chapter 72

“Oh, yes, Regina,” Emma panted as she held the brunette tightly to her chest and willed her body to relax a little so she didn’t come too quickly again. But Regina didn’t seem to care, Emma’s speedy orgasm hadn’t deterred her at all and she sucked hungrily at Emma’s breast.

Emma suddenly realised she was holding Regina’s head when she could be touching other things and quickly started to run her hands up and down Regina’s back and sides in pleasure. Regina let go of Emma’s nipple for a moment as she let out a moan and Emma smiled as she realised how sensitive Regina was to touch, filing that information away for later she rolled them over so Regina was on her back again.

Placing a knee either side of Regina’s hips Emma looked down hungrily, taking in Regina’s lust-filled eyes, mussed up hair and swollen lips and leaned forward to kiss the brunette. Her hands grabbed pleasurable handfuls of Regina’s breasts and she gently squeezed and tweaked and let Regina’s moans and gasps get lost in her open mouth.

Suddenly she felt Regina’s fingers tangling in her curls and she snatched her mouth away from Regina’s lips and looked down with a raised eyebrow as Regina toyed with Emma’s pussy.

“Am I doing this right?” Regina asked with a frown of concentration as she slipped her fingers through Emma’s soaking wet folds. Emma placed a shaky hand on either side of Regina’s body and nodded, “perfectly,” she whispered.

“Tell me what to do,” Regina requested, “I don’t know what’s what.”

Emma lifted her right hand and moved it down her body to place it over Regina’s hand and gently guided her fingers, “this is my entrance, you can put your fingers inside me if you like,” she then moved Regina’s hand up, “this is my clit, you can do this,” she rubbed Regina’s fingers gently over the nub and gasped at the pleasurable sensation.

Seeing Emma's reaction Regina nodded, "I'll do this," she said as she started to swirl around Emma's clit with two fingers. Emma pulled her own hand back and used it to balance herself again as she realised there was a good chance she was going to orgasm again ridiculously quickly unless she did something drastic.

The blonde quickly adjusted her position slightly before moving her hand down towards Regina's own clit and smiled smugly when Regina bucked up off of the bed at the sensation. Emma teased lightly around Regina's clit and smiled as Regina's movements became muddled.

Regina realised that Emma was trying to distract her from her goal so decided she could also use that strategy and lowered her hand and quickly inserted two fingers into Emma's entrance.

Half a curse word fell out of Emma's mouth and her movements over Regina's clit became disjointed as Regina twisted and turned her fingers inside Emma to learn what her lover enjoyed.

Using the disorientation to her advantage, Regina rolled her body and Emma landed on her back again, her hands flying out to the side and gripping the bed sheet as she bit her lip and rocked her hips encouragingly.

Regina knelt beside Emma and buried her two fingers deeper and deeper, watching with fascinating as Emma closed her eyes and gasped in pleasure. Regina explored with her fingers, twisting them around and mapping the inside of Emma's pussy with interest. She varied the speed, depth and power of her thrusts. Before long she had worked out that a slight curvature of her fingers being thrust into Emma at a blisteringly fast pace had Emma rising off of the bed and screaming her name over and over again.

One of Emma's hands unhooked itself from its white-knuckle grip on the bed sheet and moved downwards, Regina briefly worried that the blonde was about to stop her. However the hand hovered over Emma's waist and her fingers made their way downwards until Emma was rubbing at her clit.

Like a child not wanting to share her toys Regina threw Emma's hand to one side and emulated the motion with the thumb of her other hand.

“Oh, fuck, yes,” Emma cried out as her back arched.

Regina kept up the pace and a few moments later Emma’s body went taut as a long scream was released from Emma’s mouth followed by harsh shudders. Regina noted that her fingers buried inside Emma were being squeezed and she started to slow her motions, not wanting to hurt Emma.

As the shudders began to slow Regina slowed her own movements until Emma’s whole body fell limply into the sheets. Regina gently removed her fingers and gently ran her fingers up and down Emma’s body from her thighs to her stomach to her breasts.

“So beautiful,” Regina whispered.

“I’m glad you think so,” Emma smiled happily.

“Why ever did we wait to do this?” Regina frowned.

“Because if you weren’t ready it wouldn’t be this good,” Emma admitted.

“I’m ready now,” Regina smiled softly.

“Yes, you are,” Emma agreed.

“No, Emma,” Regina laughed lightly, “I mean... I’m ready. Now.”

Emma suddenly understood the meaning and smiled, “then let me take care of you,” she said as she gently pulled Regina down on top of her.

Chapter 73

After two hours, a few orgasms, several power-plays and more kisses than could ever be counted Emma excused herself to the bathroom for a few moments. While she was washing her hands she looked up in the mirror and noticed that she was smiling a ridiculous, goofy smile that she just couldn't seem to get rid of.

Unlocking the bathroom door she walked back into the bedroom and saw Regina holding something in her hands with a frown as soon as she saw Emma she held it aloft, “what’s this?”

“Shit,” Emma muttered under her breath, “it’s...” she consider lying but then let out a sigh, “it’s a peanut vibe.”

Regina looked just as confused, “a what?”

Emma knelt on the bed and reach over and snatched the little pink device out of Regina’s hand, “it’s nothing, just forget about it.”

“It was under your pillow,” Regina explained and then frowned, “I’m sorry, have I done something wrong?”

“No, it’s just embarrassing,” Emma said.

“Tell me?” Regina requested lightly.

Emma looked towards the opposite wall, “it’s a sex toy,” she mumbled.

“Oh!” Regina said with surprise and then started to examine Emma’s hands to seek out the device again, “let me see.”

Emma gave up the vibe and Regina looked at it in confusion, “what do you do with it?”

“You’ve never seen a sex toy?” Emma asked with interest.

“No,” Regina said, “well, I saw something back in the Enchanted Forest once but it looked quite barbaric. Explain this,” she demanded as she turned the device over in the palm of her hand.

Emma plucked it out of Regina’s hand and twisted the end of it, “it vibrates,” she said as she handed it back.

“Oh,” Regina looked at it with renewed interest, “and you...” she frowned as she struggled to understand what the point in the device was.

“Lay down,” Emma commanded as she took the device from Regina and waited for Regina to get comfortable, “it’s mainly for stimulating the clit,” she explained, “this might be a bit intense so if you want me to stop then let me know.”

Regina nodded nonchalantly, Emma had quickly discovered that Regina was game to try most things. Emma gently urged Regina’s legs apart and slowly moved the device near to Regina’s clit, “ready?”

“Get on with it,” Regina rolled her eyes.

Emma smirked and place the vibe directly onto Regina’s exposed clit and watched as Regina gasped, bucked and pulled away from the device in shock. Emma raised her eyebrow sarcastically and Regina looked from Emma to the vibe and back again before shuffling back down into position, “do it again,” she commanded.

Emma complied, this time approaching more gently and smiled when Regina’s hands clawed into the mattress and she cried out a deep moan of pleasure. Emma moved the vibe around in a similar movement that she found pleasurable and was pleased to see Regina responding in a similar way to her.

The brunette’s eyes scrunched closed as she panted for breath and seemed torn between backing away from the vibrations emanating from the device and driving her clit closer to it.

“Oh, oh! Emma!” Regina suddenly cried out and Emma examined her face to reassure herself that they were moans of pleasure rather than a sign that the feelings were too intense. Regina repeated the words over and over again until she was suddenly in spasms of pleasure and Emma quickly removed the vibe before it became too much.

Turning the device off she lay beside Regina and placed her head gently on Regina’s chest as the brunette attempted to control her breathing again.

After a while Regina opened her eyes and nodded, “I see what you mean by intense.”

“That was only on half power,” Emma said and laughed when Regina looked at her in horror.

“Well, as pleasurable as that was, it doesn’t beat your ministrations,” Regina said with a smile as she flopped her head back into the pillows.

“Yeah, it’s good to scratch and itch,” Emma said with a shrug.

Regina sat up on her elbows and frowned at Emma, “so, you use that pine nut vibe on yourself when you are alone?”

“Peanut,” Emma corrected, “yes, it’s a sex toy, you can use it while you have sex but mainly people use those kinds of things when they are turned on and alone.”

“Which is why it was under your pillow,” Regina seemed to suddenly understand, “I thought you put it there for us to use.”

“Oh!” Emma understood Regina’s confusion, “er, no, and we’re back to embarrassing, no, I er, I brought it along because I didn’t think we’d get this far on vacation and... well...”

“You were itchy,” Regina finished for her.

“Yeah,” Emma blushed and sat up to look away but was prevented when Regina took her arm, she turned to look at Regina with an embarrassed blush.

“I want to see you use it,” Regina announced in a cool, calm tone that didn’t at all indicate she was asking someone to masturbate in front of her.

“O-on me?” Emma stuttered.

“Yes,” Regina smiled as she let go of Emma’s arm and stood up and walked over to a nearby tub chair, “pleasure yourself as if I were not here. I want to see what you do so I can incorporate it into the way I pleasure you.”

“O-okay,” Emma nodded, “but then we’ll need to get some food because I’m running out of energy.”

“You may have lunch on one condition,” Regina smirked.

Emma was speechless and just looked at Regina with a deer-in-headlights expression as she nodded.

“That once we’ve eaten we return to bed, I’m not done with you yet, Miss Swan.”

Chapter 74

Emma ordered room service to be delivered to Regina's room, mainly because she didn't have the energy to get showered, dressed and to go and get food outside of the room. Regina made them some hot drinks while Emma downed an entire bottle of water in an attempt to get some much-needed fluids back into her body.

Emma had put some clothes on and sat flopped on the sofa watching as Regina hummed happily while she made drinks, she had never expected Regina to be so dynamic in bed, not that she was complaining. It was definitely the most intense and prolonged sex Emma had ever had and it looked very much like it wasn't over yet, Regina seemed very keen to make up for lost time.

Regina brought a mug of hot, sweet coffee over and placed it on the coffee table in front of Emma with a smile.

"Thank you," Emma smiled as she picked up the mug and blew on the hot liquid.

Regina sat down with her own mug of tea and smiled shyly at Emma.

"What?" Emma laughed.

"I feel like a naughty teenager," Regina admitted.

Emma smiled, "me too, it's fun isn't it?"

Regina nodded before her expression turned serious, "Emma... I know I've been... well, a little... bossy..."

Emma laughed loudly, "a little?"

Regina blushed and Emma spoke again, "you've been full on dominatrix, I love it."

“You do?” Regina asked in happy surprise.

Emma nodded, “I didn’t have any expectation about what we’d be like together, I didn’t know how it would be... but I have to say I like this side of you, it’s sexy.”

Regina blushed and nodded, “I’m glad... I find I can’t control myself when we’re in bed together.”

“I know, those teeth marks will take a while to go down,” Emma sniggered.

“I am sorry about that,” Regina repeated her previous words of apology.

“Don’t be,” Emma smiled, “I like being marked by you.”

The sound of the door in Regina’s room being opened sounded through the wall and Emma smiled, “food’s here.”

They waited a few moments for the room service trolley to be set up and for whoever was delivering it to leave, while dressed they were still in no state to receive company.

“I had no idea sex could be like this,” Regina admitted quietly.

Emma sipped her coffee and waited to see if Regina would say anything else but when she didn’t she spoke herself, “sex can be many different things to many different people. You... you’re okay with what we’re doing, right?”

“Absolutely,” Regina said quickly, “I’m just surprised how... enjoyable I’m finding it. I must have a good teacher.”

“You have an exhausted teacher,” Emma laughed as she heard the door next door close again, “come on, let’s eat.”

After lunch Emma managed to convince Regina not to go back to bed mainly after she explained that they would eventually end up sore and having to explain to Henry why they were both walking oddly and having trouble sitting down. That instantly cooled Regina’s passions and they agreed to

shower, separately as Emma wasn't sure she'd be able to keep to her own advice otherwise, and then relax by the pool.

Two hours later they were sat side by side on sun loungers, Emma applying more sun lotion and Regina reading her book.

"So," Emma said casually, "what are we doing tomorrow?"

"What's tomorrow?" Regina asked without looking up from her book.

"You know what tomorrow is," Emma rolled her eyes.

Regina lay the book down and looked like she was deep in thought, "no, nothing."

"It's my birthday, smartass," Emma said, "and it's a big one," she sighed.

"Oh, please," Regina laughed, "you come and talk to me when you reach sixty-five."

The bottle of lotion fell out of Emma's hands as she looked at Regina in shock and opened her mouth to speak.

"Be very careful about the next words out of your mouth," Regina warned as she picked up her book again.

Emma reached under her sun lounger and picked up the bottle of lotion with a smile, "I always liked older women."

Regina glared at her, "careful," she intoned in a deep, rich tone that immediately went to Emma's clit and the blonde blushed.

Emma coughed and continued applying her lotion before trying again, "go on, what are we doing tomorrow?"

"You're like a child," Regina rolled her eyes.

Emma squeezed some lotion into her hand and spent an abnormally long amount of time applying the lotion to her feet in an attempt to not make eye

contact with Regina.

Regina noticed this and considered the action for a moment before realisation dawned on her, Emma had probably never had a nice birthday experience. Years in foster care, no family and few friends. Two years ago Henry had brought her to Storybrooke. Regina frowned, “what did you do on your birthday last year?”

“Nothing,” Emma shrugged.

“Nothing?” Regina asked with confusion, “surely your parents set up some kind of celebration in Granny’s? I’m surprised they didn’t declare it a public holiday.”

Emma huffed angrily, “they didn’t know it was my birthday, okay?”

Regina put her book down and regarded the frustrated woman beside her who was applying lotion to her legs were she had already applied lotion.

“You guys have a different calendar or something, they didn’t know it was my birthday, I didn’t say anything so I actually spent the day interviewing Greg Mendell after he arrived in Storybrooke,” Emma said bitterly, “not to mention that the day I have on my birth certificate is actually not my birthday.”

“How come?” Regina asked softly as she sat up and took the bottle of lotion out of Emma’s hand and placed it on the table behind her.

“I spoke to Mary Margaret about it, much later, and we worked out the dates. The date on my birth certificate is the day I was admitted into the first home when I was a baby. That was two days after I arrived here,” Emma said sadly, “I’ve never celebrated my birthday on the right day, not once. I don’t even know my fucking birthday.”

Ignoring the other sun bathers Regina quickly got up and sat on Emma’s lounger and pulled the blonde to her in a fierce hug, “I am so sorry,” she said sincerely as she kissed Emma’s hair.

“It’s fine,” Emma sniffed as she tried to get emotions back in check as they were out in public and she felt for sure like people would be watching, “I just... it’s a sensitive topic, you know.”

“I understand,” Regina said and allowed Emma to pull away from the embrace and wipe away her tears with the back of her hand, “so, you celebrate your birthday tomorrow, on the twelfth? But technically it’s the fourteenth?”

Emma nodded, “yeah.”

“Well, this can be solved very simply,” Regina said matter-of-factly, “on the twelfth Henry, you and I will celebrate your birthday. The birthday of this world, the birthday that led Henry to you. On the fourteenth you will celebrate with your parents and the rest of Storybrooke.”

Emma smiled as she sniffed away the final tears, “there you go, making everything better again.”

Regina shook her head, “it’s my fault it’s even an issue.”

“No,” Emma said steadfastly, “since the curse broke I have done a lot of research and it all points to the same thing, my parents made a decision to put me in that wardrobe. They could have chosen for us all to be cursed together, we would have been cursed but we would have lived and we would have been together. They chose to send a child to another world and hope it survived.”

Regina opened her mouth to argue the point but as she did Emma placed a soft kiss on her mouth, “I don’t want to talk about this,” Emma whispered, “just tell me what we’re doing for my birthday, please?”

Regina nodded and smiled, “well, we’re obviously going for frozen yoghurt,” Emma smiled and nuzzled into Regina, “and then we’re going on a boat trip to look for dolphins then we’re going to the cinema then we’re coming back here for a picnic on the beach while we watch the sun go down.”

Emma sat back and looked at Regina with confusion, “how... how did...”

“Henry told me, he told me that you both talked months ago about what would make the best birthday, he was planning your thirtieth even then. It’s just now I’m a part of it too,” Regina smiled.

“I should never have let you out of bed,” Emma said as she kissed Regina again.

“Eww, stop the kissing,” Henry’s voice prompted them to laugh and pull apart, “are you two back from shopping?”

“Sure are, Kid,” Emma smiled at him while Regina busied herself blushing, “how’s kid’s club treating ya?”

“Pretty good,” Henry shrugged, “we’re just going to a pottery lesson.”

His disinterested tone was quickly picked up on by Regina, “you don’t have to go, you can stay with us if you like?”

“Really?” Henry smiled, “are you sure?”

“Of course,” Regina said, “let me sign you out and we can do something together.”

Regina looked at Emma and Emma smiled and nodded happily, silently conveying to Regina that spending time as a family was exactly how she wanted to spend her last few hours as a twenty-nine year old.

Chapter 75

That evening before bed Henry and Emma sat in Emma's room watching television and sneakily feasting on popcorn and candy that Emma had purchased from a vending machine while Regina had a relaxing bath in her room.

As the commercial break started again Henry checked his phone for any updates, he'd recently gotten into social media and was now constantly glued to his phone.

"Emma?" Henry asked casually while Emma tucked into some popcorn while she looked at her own phone.

"Henry?" Emma replied without looking up.

"Mom seemed really happy today," he said as he flopped out on Emma's bed and held his phone above his head as he flicked through updates.

"Did she?" Emma tried to remain casual as she stood up to make herself some coffee, hoping the sound of the kettle boiling would put a halt to any potential questioning.

"Yeah, she must have really enjoyed the shopping trip," Henry looked at Emma's back as the blonde made herself a drink.

"Yeah, I suppose she did," Emma nodded.

"What did you get?" Henry asked.

Emma froze for a second before quickly recovering, "nothing, just window shopping, you know?"

"Cool," Henry smiled to himself.

The noisy sound of the kettle boiling filled the room and when it was done Emma poured the boiling water into her cup and began adding coffee and sugar.

“Why doesn’t Mom just sleep in here with you?” Henry suddenly asked.

Luckily Emma caught the coffee cup before it spilt everywhere, “I’m sorry?”

“Mom, I know she comes in here at night, and then she comes back... wouldn’t it just be easier if she slept in here?” Henry asked as if it were obvious.

“So, you know about that, huh?” Emma asked, trying to keep her tone casual.

“Yeah, I wake up sometimes and she’s not in bed so I assume she’s in here,” Henry said with a shrug.

“And you’re okay with that?” Emma asked, mindful to not talk about why Regina came to her room, she didn’t need to get stuck into a conversation about that.

“Sure, you’re together anyway, isn’t that what couples do?” Henry chuckled, “and then I get my own room,” he turned to look at the television, “show’s starting again.”

Henry put his phone down and rolled onto his front and focused his attention on the television. Emma regarded him with interest as she again wondered how a young boy whose major interests were comics and doughnuts could sometimes be so wise.

“I’m... just gonna see if your mom wants a drink,” Emma said quickly as she ducked through the interconnecting doors into Regina’s room and closed it behind her and leaned on it as she let out a breath. It was one thing engaging in a sexual relationship but it was quite a different thing for Henry to know about it and Emma was concerned about Regina’s reaction.

The distant sound of relaxing violin strings sounded from the bathroom and Emma took a deep breath and approached the closed door and gently knocked, “Regina, can I come in?”

“I’m in the bath,” Regina’s nervous voice floated back.

“Yeah, I guess, I’ve seen it before, remember?” Emma pointed out, “I just need to talk to you quickly.”

“Okay, come in,” Regina replied.

Emma stepped into the room quickly and closed the door behind her, not wanting any of the heat to seep out. She averted her eyes from the bath to give Regina some privacy and sat on the closed lid of the toilet.

“Is everything all right?” Regina asked.

Emma looked up to speak but found herself speechless at the sight of Regina in the bath. The entire bath was covered in a thick layer of bubbles except Regina’s head and her chest that poked out from the white foam. Her glistening arms were out of the water and casually draped on either side of the bath, her makeup was removed and her hair was wet and slicked back having recently been washed.

“Emma?” Regina asked again, this time with concern in her tone.

Emma desperately wanted to flip the lock on the door, crank up the music so they couldn’t be heard and get into the bath with Regina and... “sorry,” Emma shook her head, “everything’s fine, I just wanted to tell you something...”

“Yes?” Regina frowned, clearly not convinced that everything was okay.

“Henry... kinda knows that you’ve been coming into my room at night,” Emma cringed as Regina’s face turned from concerned at Emma’s wellbeing to something closer to an oncoming panic attack.

“B-but,” Regina spluttered, “nothing happened, I mean... we... we didn’t... we just spoke, a-and I didn’t stay...”

Emma quickly knelt beside the bath and took Regina's hand, "Regina, it's fine, he doesn't care. In fact he thinks you should just sleep in my room."

Regina sat up quickly and Emma got an eyeful of firm, round breasts glistening from the warm water that was running down them, "but, then he'll think..."

"Regina," Emma said firmly to stop the brunette's rambling, "Henry is very astute, he knows we're in a relationship and he thinks we should share a bed like most couples do. I'm sure what we do in that bed is the furthest thing from his mind, he just wants us to be happy."

Regina subconsciously threaded her fingers through Emma's as she took that information in, "okay, so, what now?"

"We share a bed tonight, but only if you're ready?" Emma asked as she reached up and tucked a loose piece of wet hair behind Regina's ear.

Regina nodded, "I'd like that..."

Emma smiled, "then waking up as a thirty-year-old is going to be suddenly suck a little less."

They gazed at each other for a few seconds before Emma quickly got to her feet, "I... I better go, I," she looked over Regina's smooth, wet skin and swallowed, "yeah, I'm going now."

Regina didn't get the chance to say anything else as Emma quickly left the bathroom. With a shake of the head she relaxed back into her bath with a small smile starting to form on her face.

Emma walked back into her room and closed the door behind her and looked at Henry seriously, "right, I've spoken to your mom and she agrees and she's gonna stay in here tonight."

"'k," Henry mumbled as he watched the television screen.

"Henry," Emma said as she knelt by the bed so he'd look at her, "your mom is really sensitive about it so please don't say anything that might upset

her, okay?"

"Why is she sensitive about it?" Henry frowned.

Emma sighed, "because... your mom doesn't want you to be uncomfortable with her and I being in a relationship."

"I'm not," Henry shrugged.

"I know but she thinks you might be and you know she gets embarrassed about stuff like showing emotions," Emma explained.

"But I don't get it," Henry frowned, "why does she not want me to know that you sleep together but she's happy with me helping her to p..."

Henry slammed his hand over his mouth and his eyes flew wide open as he realised he had nearly said something he shouldn't.

Emma was intrigued and smiled as her eyes shone brightly, "help her what, Henry?"

"I can't say," Henry shook his head, "she will literally kill me."

Emma took in his panicked expression and nodded her head, "okay, okay, calm down, I'll put the thumbscrews away."

A while later Henry was engrossed in his television show again and Emma used her phone to search for verbs starting with the letter P.

Pack, she thought, Regina was happy for Henry to help her pack something? No. Pass? She was happy for him to help her pass... no. Pick? Happy for Henry to help her pick... yes, pick what? Pick a birthday present maybe? Plan? Plan her birthday. Yes, that must be it. Regina must have sworn him to secrecy.

With a grin she put her phone to one side and smiled as she returned her attention to the television.

Chapter 76

Emma sat up in bed reading her book and watching as a pyjama-clad Regina walked to the bathroom for the seventh time in five minutes and sighed. Something was clearly on Regina's mind but the brunette wasn't going to admit to anything.

They had said goodnight to Henry and Regina had moved a few essentials from her room to Emma's room, she had stacked a few things in the bathroom and placed some clothes in the wardrobe but now she seemed to be avoiding getting into bed.

She passed through the room again seemingly checking for the umpteenth time that she had placed something in a drawer when Emma finally spoke up, "you can have the spare bed if you like?"

Regina regarded her with a shocked expression, "do you want me to sleep in the spare bed?"

"No," Emma said as she laid her book down in her lap, "but something is bothering you so I'm giving you the option, whatever makes you feel more comfortable."

Regina fussed with her hands and looked down at the floor as she understood that she hadn't managed to be as subtle as she had originally hoped.

"I'm sorry," Regina said as she leaned against the desk.

"Don't be sorry," Emma tried to smile comfortingly but the truth was she was frightened that Regina was having second thoughts.

"I just don't know how to do this," Regina said as she waved her arm around the room.

Emma frowned, "do what?"

Regina let out a frustrated sigh and walked towards the bathroom and slammed the door behind her. With a sigh of her own Emma got out of bed and made her way to the bathroom door and gently knocked on it, “Regina?”

“Go away, Emma,” Regina whispered back.

“You gonna sit in the bathroom all night?” Emma folded her arms in frustration.

“Well, I can’t go back to my room, Henry will blame me for ruining everything,” Regina said quietly and Emma realised that Regina was crying.

Emma leaned her forehead on the door gently, “Regina, you said you didn’t know how to do this, what did you mean?”

Silence stretched out so Emma tried again, “please, Regina, please talk to me...”

“Sharing a bed,” Regina’s voice came back harshly.

Emma thought for a moment and then closed her eyes in understanding, “you’ve never shared a bed before?”

“Rarely,” Regina admitted, “and usually when I had to.”

Emma understood the unspoken inference that it was when the King came to see her.

“Okay,” Emma said calmly, “well this is how it’s done, you can go back to your own room, you can sleep in the spare bed or you can sleep with me. No one will judge you on what you decide, it’s your decision. Personally, I’d love for you to sleep with me tonight and we can do that anyway you like, we can pick sides and not touch, or we can cuddle, or just hold hands. It’s literally whatever you want to do, Regina.”

After some silence Regina spoke softly, “I just need some time... please...”

“Sure, I’ll... I’ll be in bed,” Emma said with a sad smile, “I love you, Regina.”

Emma stepped away from the door and sadly walked back into the bedroom and climbed into bed and threw her book onto the bedside cabinet and laid down and pulled the covers over her. She hated that Regina had these demons and desperately wished she could take them away from her. But then she knew that Regina's history, her demons, were what made her who she was and that was who Emma had fallen in love with.

She wondered, not for the first time, if Regina viewed her as an descendant of Leopold and if their relationship was bringing back memories she'd rather forget. It was a question she'd never ask Regina outright, too afraid that she might create a link in Regina's brain where none currently existed.

She heard the click of the bathroom room and the soft sound of bare feet on plush carpet. Her back was to Regina so she just remained still and quiet and listened for sounds that would enlighten her as to Regina's choice.

She felt the bed behind her dip as Regina climbed into the bed beside her, there was some movement as Regina got under the covers and then darkness fell over the room as Regina turned off the light switch.

When she felt Regina's body against her back she smiled in relief and happiness and adjusted her position to allow Regina's arm to curl around her and come to rest just below her breasts.

"I love you too," Regina whispered as she laid her head on the pillow.

Chapter 77

“Time to get up!” Henry’s voice announced loudly, “tell me when I can open my eyes!”

Emma sat up in bed disorientated and looked over at where Henry was stood in his pyjamas with his eyes closed and a large, brightly coloured box in his hands. She rubbed her eyes and looked down beside her where Regina was waking up, “we’re decent, Henry,” Regina mumbled as she sat up and looked at her watch.

Henry opened his eyes and ran up and jumped into the middle of the bed and dropped the box by Emma’s feet as he climbed up to Emma and embraced her, “happy birthday!”

“Wow, thanks, Henry,” Emma said as she hugged him tightly until he broke free and picked up the box and handed it to her, “it’s from both of us.”

Emma look at the box and placed it in her lap and looked at Regina who had sat up in bed next to her and was smiling as well.

“Open it!” Henry pleaded.

“Okay, okay, I’m still waking up,” Emma snickered as she looked at the Mills family who were both watching her with smiles on their faces.

She tore at the brightly coloured wrapping paper to reveal a large white box, she lifted the lid and moved some white tissue paper aside to reveal a pair of brown leather knee high boots. She picked up one the boots and examined it in more detail, it was completely her style, rustic, buckles, perfect colour but they looked expensive and something she’d never be able to afford on her salary.

“I... I can’t accept these, these must have...” Emma started to shake her head.

“Don’t even think about declining that gift,” Regina murmured.

“Do you like them?” Henry looked at her with an excited smile.

“Like them? I love them, they are totally perfect,” Emma smiled and looked at Regina, “how did you know?”

“It was a joint effort,” Regina said gesturing to Henry.

“How did you know my size?” Emma asked in wonderment as she picked up the other boot and looked at it.

Regina rolled her eyes, “we looked at your shoes that you leave laying around everywhere.”

“I forgot the card,” Henry said as he bounced off of the bed and ran back into the other room.

“Thank you,” Emma said to Regina, “you really didn’t have to.”

“I wanted to,” Regina said as she leaned forward and kissed Emma softly on the lips.

“Eww,” Henry laughed as he came back in with an envelope and handed it to Emma, “we made it.”

“‘We’?” Emma looked at Regina.

“I can be crafty,” Regina shrugged.

Emma opened the envelope and took out the card and examined it with interest, thick black card was the base with a cut-out of a white swan, a red leather jacket and a yellow bug all glued onto the card. Happy birthday was written in thick silver calligraphy and Emma just stared at the card in shock that anyone had gone to such trouble for her.

She opened the card and both Henry and Regina had written their names with several kisses.

“This... this is the best greetings card I have ever seen in my life,” she said honestly as she held it reverently. She looked up to see Henry looking at Regina expectantly as Regina seemed to ponder something before finally nodding.

Henry bounced off of the bed again and dashed back into the other room.

“We were going to give you this later but now seems as good a time as any and Henry will burst if we don’t do this now,” Regina smiled uncertainly, “but don’t feel obligated.”

Emma frowned and Henry tore back into the room with another envelope and jumped back onto the bed and handed it to Emma with a smile.

Emma looked at Regina curiously as she ripped open the envelope and took out a blank piece of card, she looked at it in confusion until Henry turned it over for her.

A house key was taped to the middle of the card and the words ‘whenever you’re ready’ were written in beautiful calligraphy below the key.

“What’s this?” Emma was pretty sure she knew but desperately needed clarification.

“A bicycle,” Regina sassed with a sigh.

“It’s a key to the house, our house,” Henry said excitedly, “we want you to move in with us!”

Emma blinked in shock at Henry before her head snapped around to Regina to get confirmation.

“What Henry is trying to say,” Regina clarified, “is that we know you don’t have your own place and you’re looking to move out of the loft. And our house has plenty of room so we wanted to invite you to live with us... I know it’s rather soon but both Henry and I wanted to extend the offer to you.”

“You’re asking me to move in with you?” Emma questioned, “like, live with you both? In your house?”

“I know our relationship is very new,” Regina explained carefully, “but where I come from dating is a luxury that most people don’t have, matches are arranged and you live with what you are given. In the very short time, and I do know it’s a short time, that we have been together I already know that, in my mind, this is for the long-term. But I don’t want you to feel rushed, hence the note.”

“When you’re ready,” Henry added with a smile.

“And the offer is not conditional on our relationship,” Regina added, “the house is large and we can easily accommodate you and your leather jacket collection.”

Emma smiled at the sarcasm and looked down at the key with tears in her eyes.

“Are you sad?” Henry asked with uncertainty as he looked at Regina for support.

“No, these are happy tears,” Emma said as she smiled up at Henry and held the key to her chest, “I appreciate this gesture so much.”

“So you’ll move in?” Henry beamed.

“Henry!” Regina admonished, “let Emma come to her own conclusion, it’s a very big decision and we mustn’t push. Go and get ready for breakfast, we’ll be in shortly.”

“Okay,” Henry smiled and padded to the next room, closing the door behind him.

“Is it too much?” Regina asked softly.

“No, not too much,” Emma admitted, “I just... I just need some time to...”

“I understand,” Regina smiled as she kissed Emma’s cheek and got out of bed, “let’s get you some coffee and some food.”

Chapter 78

“Another, please,” Emma said to the bartender who nodded at her as he removed her empty tumbler and set about making her another White Russian.

“Wanna see my ID? I’m thirty today,” Emma laughed as she waved her driving licence around.

“That’s fine, ma’am,” the bartender smiled as he grabbed a straw and a napkin and placed her drink in front of her, “happy birthday.”

“Thank you,” Emma toasted him while wondering why it all seemed familiar and wondered if she’d already had the conversation with him. She wouldn’t be surprised, it was half past eleven and she knew she had been in the bar for a few hours since she messed everything up.

She sighed and fidgeted on her seat as she played with a previously destroyed napkin that she had in her hand. The day had been perfect, Emma couldn’t have hoped for anything better and it was so clear that Regina had hand-crafted everything to be just right.

After breakfast they took a drive to a local mall and did some shopping, Regina spoilt Henry rotten and Emma rolled her eyes and left them to it. She wondered through the mall staring forlornly at things she wanted but were incompatible with her ridiculously low bank balance, she didn’t see Regina watching her every move like a hawk.

They had frozen yoghurt for a mid-morning snack, Emma piled her cup high with random flavours and heaped on the toppings while Regina went to the bathroom. When Regina returned she had bought a jacket, a DVD boxset and jewellery box that Emma had been secretly coveting. There had been a small standoff where Emma demanded that Regina stop spending her money on her but Regina just smiled and kissed her and before long Emma was accepting the gifts.

Then they went to the boat, Emma had always loved the water, when she was a kid she had often looked out at people on boats with such envy. They had the freedom to just sail away to wherever they wanted to be and no one could ever follow them. She had told Henry about that once when they were discussing Emma's Bug, she tried to explain to the kid about the freedom of the open road and she thought that he hadn't listened but clearly he had taken it all in.

There was a barbecue on the boat and they ate as they looked at dolphins who swam along beside them. Regina tried to look like she was having fun but when you had grown up seeing fairies, ogres, trolls and all many of other beasts a dolphin really wasn't going to be impressive. Eventually Emma released her from her girlfriend duties and told her she could go and sunbathe at the front of the boat which she quickly did without argument.

One of the crew had indicated Regina laying out in the sun and told Emma she was a lucky woman and Emma beamed with pride as she agreed with him. Although soon after she told Regina to cover herself up a bit because she didn't want the crew perving over her.

The boat trip had been amazing and Emma talked about it endlessly as Regina drove them to the next destination, a cinema. Something else Emma had confided in Henry was that she missed trips to the cinema, she was beginning to understand that confiding in Henry was worse than confiding in Mary Margaret. She forgave him once they were sat in the cinema watching a movie about space and aliens. Luckily it was the middle of a weekday afternoon and the cinema was practically empty as Regina couldn't shut up about the size of the popcorn or drink container for the first hour of the movie.

Emma drove them back to the hotel, happy to put her aviators on and take the roof down as she drove along the ocean road happy that her thirtieth birthday was more than she ever could have hoped for. It wasn't until she parked the car that she remembered Regina's next phase of the day, a picnic on the private beach as they watched the sunset.

As they walked towards the beach Emma noticed it had all been set up by the hotel staff and she once again admired the organisational skills of the

older woman. The three of them sat on the blankets and talked about the day while they ate and drank from the picnic hamper that had been provided for them.

As the sun started to set Henry asked if he could go and play in the playground in the hotel grounds and Emma recognised a badly concealed effort to give them some alone time and smiled as she sent him on his way. Regina sat with her legs out in front of her and playing with Emma's hair as the blonde laid down with her head in Regina's lap and watched the sun going down.

"Hey there, how's the head?"

Emma looked up with a grimace at Todd who frowned, "okay, bad question," he said, "want me to leave you alone?"

"Why not?" Emma said as she sipped her drink, "it's how I'm going to end up anyway."

"Ooookay," Todd said as he sat down and ordered an orange juice from the bartender, "want to talk about it?"

"It's my birthday," Emma said, "I'm thirty today."

"Congratulations," Todd said with a smile.

"And now I'm probably single too," Emma said as she finished her drink and indicated to the bartender that she wanted another.

The bartender gave Todd a look and Emma realised that Todd hadn't been passing and he'd been called to deal with her, "oh, you traitor," she chuckled to the bartender, "I thought we had something, Terry."

"Jerry," the bartender said as he put another White Russian down in front of Emma and Emma leaned forward and squinted at his name badge.

"That's really small writing," Emma said dismissively.

“Jerry called me because he’s worried about you,” Todd admitted as Jerry walked away to serve some other customers, “is there anything I can do?”

“Rewind time about,” she looked at the clock, “four hours?”

“What happened four hours ago?” Todd asked casually as he sipped his orange juice.

“I told Regina I didn’t want to move in with her,” Emma said as she flopped her head onto her arm miserably.

“Ah,” Todd said, “and she didn’t take it very well?”

“I kinda didn’t say it in a very good way,” Emma admitted.

“What happened?” Todd frowned.

Emma sat up again and took a sip of her drink, “Regina’s... she’s not from round here. Where she comes from people don’t really spend a lot of time getting to know each other you know? They kinda get pushed into relationships and before long they’re married, living together, you know?”

“Like arranged marriages?” Todd asked.

“Yes!” Emma banged her hand on the bar, “exactly! So, that’s what she is used to but me... I’m used to taking things slowly, you know? Get to know someone, find out all about them, having my own space and doing my own thing. Guess how many dates we have been on?”

Todd shrugged, “no idea.”

“Guess!” Emma demanded.

“I dunno, thirty?” Todd speculated.

“Two!” Emma said, “well, maybe a couple more now, it got a bit confusing because we went on vacation.”

“Okay, but you must have known her longer than that for her to ask you to move in with her?” Todd presumed, “and you share a son, don’t you?”

“Well, yeah, we’ve known each other for...” she smiled, “exactly two years today.”

“There you go, two dates but two years of knowing each other,” Todd smiled.

“But two dates isn’t enough...” Emma started.

“Says who?” Todd asked.

“Everyone,” Emma said firmly.

Todd laughed, “says no one. People are all different, some people take years to know if they’ve found the one, some people know within a few hours. It doesn’t matter how many dates you’ve been on or how long you’ve known someone, when you know, you know.”

Emma considered that for a moment and Todd spoke again, “why did you say no?”

“Because it’s too soon,” Emma replied with a frown.

“Pretend you’ve been on... I dunno... a hundred dates, and you’ve known her for five years, would you accept then?” Todd asked.

“Yes, absolutely,” Emma nodded.

“Why?”

“Because she’s amazing, I’m in love with her and I don’t want to be without her. This vacation has made me see that being near her all the time is what I really... fuck,” Emma said as realisation set in.

Todd smiled, “there you go.”

“I want to move in,” Emma stated with wide, scared eyes.

“Seems like it,” Todd agreed.

“But I told her I didn’t want to,” Emma panicked, “I told her it was too soon and we’re not in the Enchanted Forest anymore and people need more time.”

Todd frowned at the Enchanted Forest comment but put it down to the alcohol, “and what did she say?”

“She said she felt ready,” Emma confessed, “I kinda said that I didn’t think she should have involved Henry in it because that felt like emotional blackmail.”

“Ouch,” Todd winced, “did you mean that?”

“No,” Emma whispered, “Henry’s a great kid, he’d understand... I just said it because I was scared.”

“Of?”

Emma took a deep breath, “how strong my feelings are for her. It’s been such a short amount of time and already I...” she sighed, “I’m a foster kid, I’m not used to people wanting me around. I’m used to people wanting me in their lives for the short-term and then kicking me to the kerb when they realise what I’m like.”

“Miss Mills doesn’t seem like a lady who would make a decision unless she was one hundred percent certain about it,” Todd pointed out.

“I fucked up,” Emma said and flopped her head into the crook of her elbow again.

Todd pushed the half-consumed White Russian away from her and pointed to Jerry to get rid of it.

“You kinda did,” Todd said, “but it can be fixed. It’s your birthday and I know that if you go up there and say you’re sorry and you were scared and overwhelmed you’ll be just fine.”

“I wanna move in with her,” Emma whined.

“Then tell her that too,” Todd said as he got off of his bar stool and gently took Emma’s arm for her to do the same.

A few minutes later they were standing outside of Emma’s door and Todd helped her with the keycard and whispered, “you have another three minutes left of your birthday, go and make it count!”

Emma smiled gratefully at him and walked into her room and closed the door softly behind her, shushing it when it made a loud click. She shrugged out of her jacket and dropped it to the floor and leaned forward to undo the zips on her new boots but as she did she felt a head-rush and stood up quickly and held onto the wall.

It was then she noticed a small light was on in the sleeping area and stumbled into the room to see Regina reading by a tiny nightlight with her glasses on. Regina took a deep breath and looked over the top of the book at Emma with a pointed look.

Emma looked at her watch, “I have another,” she squinted, “fifty seconds of my birthday and I wish for you to listen to me and you can’t not because it’s my birthday and birthday wishes are sacred.”

Regina lowered her book and removed her glasses, “go on then, Miss Swan.”

“I’m sorry, I’m an idiot, I’m a complete fucking screw up. I want to move in with you, I can’t imagine my life without you and... and I’m scared because I’m not used to loving someone and I’m really not used to being loved. My whole life people have not wanted me, my parents stuck me in a wardrobe, I was in and out of foster homes where I was never wanted and was only seen as a paycheque. I got in some bad relationships where I was used, people pretended they loved me so I’d give them stuff, money, my body, whatever they wanted. Then I met Neal, he was sweet but even he fucked me over and I went to prison.”

Emma took a deep breath and looked at her watch and frowned, “right, yeah, erm... I kinda don’t deserve you, you treat me too well, you know? You’re too nice, I’m waiting for the other shoe to drop. I’ve never been this happy and I don’t know what it means but I love you. And maybe I’m an idiot for loving you but I do and I want to live with you, I just got scared. You saw the potential in us before I did. And I said it was too soon but maybe it’s not, maybe it’s just right. We’re all different right? Todd said we’re all different and he seems to know what he is talking about. So maybe it’s not too soon, maybe I won’t fuck this up.”

“Finished?” Regina questioned after Emma finally stopped to take breath.

“Yeah, it’s not my birthday anymore,” Emma said as she looked at her watch and squinted as she moved her arm further away and then brought it in close again.

“How much have you had to drink?” Regina asked as she watched Emma having trouble standing up straight.

“I think anything I say may be used against me,” Emma nodded.

Regina put her book and glasses on the bedside table and got out of bed and approached Emma.

“Sit,” she commanded as she pointed to the spare bed.

Once Emma sat on the edge of the bed Regina knelt in front of her and removed her boots, “you are very, very drunk,” Regina said slowly, “and I want you to drink as much water as you can keep down and then we’re going to go to bed and we will talk about this when you are sober. Which may be in seven days judging by the state of you.”

“You’re not dumping me?” Emma frowned.

“No, I’m not dumping you,” Regina said as she stood up and put the boots in the wardrobe and got a bottle of water out of the fridge, “drink this.”

Emma took the water bottle, “are you angry at me?”

“No,” Regina admitted as she started to undo Emma’s jeans and shimmied them down her legs, “I’m not angry at you.”

“I’m tired,” Emma said with heavy eyes.

“I can imagine,” Regina said as she folded Emma’s jeans and placed them on the desk before removing the blonde’s socks, “drink some more water and then we can go to bed.”

“Together?” Emma asked before she started drinking the water.

“Together,” Regina confirmed.

“And you’re not mad?” Emma questioned again.

Regina smiled, “no, I’m not mad,” she leaned forward and kisses Emma tenderly on the lips.

“And I can move in?” Emma pushed.

“Yes, you can move in,” Regina nodded, “now, come to bed.”

Ten minutes later and Emma, with Regina’s help, was dressed for bed and had washed up and was now gently sleeping. Regina regarded the blonde tenderly in the dim reading light, she knew Emma had her own demons but she didn’t know that they had such a strong hold of her.

It was becoming clear that Emma was a carer and spent little time looking after herself, Regina decided it was high time that was remedied and began to plan a way to help Emma as she had helped Regina.

Chapter 79

Emma woke up with a jolt and immediately regretted opening her eyes at all.

“Ah, oh, wow, okay,” she mumbled as she scrunched her eyes closed and brought a hand to her throbbing temple.

After a few moments of regulating her breathing in order to get her sickness under control she opened one eye and looked around the room to try to piece together what had happened the night before.

“Oh God,” she moaned as she tried to sit up, failing a couple of times before she finally made it.

On her bedside table was a large glass of water and a piece of hotel stock paper and she picked up the paper and unfolded it.

‘We’ve gone for breakfast, I assumed you needed more sleep. Make sure you drink plenty of water. See you soon.’

Flashes of the night before came back to her and she groaned as she looked down at the piece of paper to analyse the text some more. The part about drinking water seemed caring but the absence of any kisses or a more loving sign-off left Emma with a cold feeling.

The sound of the hotel room door opening had her snapping her head around fast, which turned out to be a massive mistake as she grabbed her head and let out a low moan.

Henry entered the room with a wide grin, “whoa, you look awful,” he laughed.

“Thanks,” Emma mumbled, “where’s your mom?”

“By the pool,” Henry said as he opened up the wardrobe, “she wanted me to get her a thin cardigan, it’s a bit windy.”

“How is she?” Emma asked him casually.

Henry picked a thin white cardigan off of a hanger and looked at Emma and silently shrugged.

“How much trouble am I in?” Emma asked him with a wince.

“She’s not angry,” Henry admitted but then his face fell, “but she is sad.”

“Shit,” Emma mumbled as she wondered if she had overshot angry and gone straight to disappointed.

“So, what are you going to do?” Henry folded his arms and regarded her seriously.

Emma looked at him and covered her smile with her hand, he was the spitting image of Regina. Arms folded, serious expression and an air of superiority but the fact that he had messy, wet hair from being in the pool and was wearing Ironman swimming shorts somehow let the effect down.

“Well, first I’m getting rid of this han... headache,” she corrected swiftly, “I’m going to have breakfast and then have a gym session and then I’ll meet you guys out by the pool. Can you tell your mom?”

“Sure,” Henry shrugged, “just... you know, fix it.”

Emma was about to say something when she realised that the moral high ground probably wasn’t somewhere she should tread just yet and simply nodded at him.

It was two hours later when Emma finally made her way onto the pool terrace, she’d ditched her light aviators in favour of some much darker sunglasses. The carb-fuelled breakfast, hour-long work out session in the gym and buckets of water had almost cleared her hangover and she knew the remaining headache was caused by stress and worry.

Dressed in shorts and a t-shirt she walked around the pool and saw Henry coming down the water slide, as he swam to the edge he saw her and smiled before indicating the other side of the pool with his head.

Emma looked up surreptitiously and saw Regina laying on her front on a sun lounger. Henry got out of the pool, “how’s your headache?”

“Still there but better,” Emma smiled, “how are you doing?”

“I’ll be better when you fixed whatever you did,” Henry said with a pointed look.

“Right, yeah, okay,” Emma nodded and walked around the pool towards Regina attempting to keep a neutral face but wincing from the bright glare of the sun. Since she’d woken up she had desperately tried to piece together what had happened the night before but she was pretty sure she was missing quite a lot of important information. Such as how she got back to the room and how she got into bed.

“Good morning,” Regina said without looking up, still laying on her front with her arms crossed under her head as a pillow. Emma swallowed as she stuttered out a greeting.

“Sit down, you’re in my sun,” Regina commanded and Emma quickly realised how Regina had known she was there and just as quickly took a step to the side and perched herself on the edge of a sun lounger.

“How are you feeling?” Regina asked, eyes still closed as she basked in the warmth of the sun.

“Not one hundred percent but much better,” Emma admitted, “I am so sorry.”

“For what?” Regina asked as she opened her eyes and looked up at Emma without moving.

Emma frowned, “is this a trick question?”

“No,” Regina said softly, “you have some things to apologise for but I want to make sure you’re apologising for the right things.”

“Are you going to break up with me?” Emma quickly asked.

“What? No,” Regina laughed, “where did you get that idea from?”

“Because you’re mad at me,” Emma said, “because I was a jerk.”

Regina frowned, “you really think my feelings for you are so half-hearted?”

“You’re scaring me,” Emma admitted, “you usually get all angry and shouty but now you’re calm and that’s worse.”

“You want me to shout at you?” Regina asked in disbelief as she sat up on her elbows and regarded Emma with confusion.

“No,” Emma admitted quietly as she looked around the pool area.

Regina glanced at Emma’s hands and noticed that they were tightly coiled together and almost shaking so she sat up and sat cross-legged on her sun lounger and looked at Emma.

“I am not breaking up with you,” Regina said clearly, “I am cross with you because of some of the things that happened last night but I am not breaking up with you.”

Emma looked at Regina and nodded slowly.

“I’m cross because you went and drunk yourself into a stupor,” Regina said, “and then you came back, hours later, so drunk you could hardly walk. I was frightened that you’d throw up in your sleep and choke to death so I stayed awake half of the night watching you.”

Emma blushed, “I’m sorry...” she whispered.

“I know Henry put you on the spot when he asked if you’d be moving in with us after the picnic yesterday evening and I understand now that you were

tired and emotional. I appreciate that you waited for Henry to be out of earshot when you told me you thought it was too soon but... the way you told me, it was hurtful," Regina admitted quietly.

"I know, I..."

Regina put her hand up to silence Emma, "your methods were flawed but following your speech last night I now have a greater understanding of why."

Emma tried to keep a passive face but Regina took one look at her and sighed, "you don't remember, do you?"

"Bits and pieces," Emma confessed.

"Well, we needn't repeat it all," Regina sighed, "needless to say, I understand your reaction and I know that your birthday is clearly an emotional time for you and maybe the timing wasn't right."

"I want to move in with you," Emma clarified, "whatever shit I said last night, I was scared and stupid..."

Regina leant forward and put a comforting hand onto Emma's that were still curled in her lap, "nothing has changed, I still want you to move in but when you are ready. If that is now or in a year's time then that is fine, as the note said it's when you are ready. Nothing has changed."

Emma looked up at Regina and gave her a small smile, "I'm sorry."

"For what?" Regina smiled.

Emma rolled her eyes, "for drinking at the bar and coming back to the room drunk, and making you worry."

Regina nodded her acceptance of that, "I did a lot of thinking last night," at Emma's panicked look she quickly added, "nothing bad. But it did occur to me that while you have been taking such good care of me you've not allowed me to do the same for you."

“I’m fine,” Emma said quickly but Regina was already shaking her head in disagreement.

“Emma, why do you think my magic was going haywire back in Storybrooke?”

“Because of Greg... what he did...” Emma supposed.

“No, it was because I have been keeping everything locked up for years, yes Greg was what eventually broke me but I understand now the relief of when you finally open up and tell someone else what is bothering you,” Regina said honestly, “I know that your past has shaped who you are and I wouldn’t change that for the world but I also know that it bothers you.”

Regina sighed, “I know I’m not the easiest person to talk to but I just wanted to let you know that I’m here for you if you want to talk to someone.”

Emma looked around the pool and bit her lip before looking at Regina again with an apologetic expression, “I’m... not great at opening up. I sometimes worry that if I do it will all kinda explode out of me and I’ll never be the same, I know that sounds stupid.”

“Not at all,” Regina chuckled, “funnily enough I know exactly what you mean. Just know that the offer is there. And, in the meantime, we have four days left of this vacation and I intend to enjoy it.”

Chapter 80

Emma adjusted the radio in the Bug for the millionth time since leaving the airport. The late hour was causing her to yawn so she wanted some music to keep her occupied while Regina and Henry slept as she drove them back to Storybrooke. However radio stations were few and far between so every now and then static filled the speakers and she had to quickly retune the old stereo to ensure the noise didn't disturb her passengers.

Despite being a long drive it was passing quickly as Emma recalled the vacation with a large smile on her face. Her reminiscing avoided the awkward almost-fight from the eve of her birthday and focused on the good times and there were a great many of them.

Regina had requested more swimming lessons and even accompanied Henry in the pool on the last evening to watch Despicable Me. When Emma noticed how cold Regina was but how engrossed she was in the film she broke her own golden rule and got into her own swimming costume and joined mother and son in the pool. Emma reminded Regina to swim around to keep herself active so the chill in the air didn't get to her and when they weren't swimming they cuddled, appropriately as there were so many children in the pool.

Not at all like the day before at the beach when Henry was playing with some other kids on the beach and Regina and Emma had waded out into the sea. Regina asked Emma to hold her in case the seabed was uneven and a few moments later the brunette was guiding Emma's hand into her bikini briefs. Emma tried to explain that sex in water hardly ever worked as the water washed away all the wetness but Regina was persistent and absolutely drenched with want. They fooled around, attempting to look casual and like they were simply talking and holding each other above the water line while below the water line Emma's fingers were pumping in and out of Regina in a frenzy.

While sex had played a big part in the second half of their vacation they also talked a lot. Sharing a bed meant that Regina would talk about her past before they slept and Emma found herself confiding details she had never thought she would disclose. Sometimes they woke up in the night after Regina had suffered a nightmare and they were cuddle and whisper to each other until they fell asleep again. Henry hadn't experienced any further nightmares, Regina surmised it was because he was too exhausted following his full and energetic days.

They had gone to a local stables where equine therapy classes were being held and Regina learnt more about the details behind the theory and gathered more ideas on how to set up similar sessions in Storybrooke. That night Regina had sat up for hours making notes while Emma channel-hopped through every channel the hotel had to offer while sneaking looks at Regina in her glasses.

As the Storybrooke sign appeared up ahead Emma took a deep breath and slowed the car down to a stop and gently touched Regina's arm to wake her.

The brunette blinked a few times before realising she had slumped asleep in the Bug, "I'm sorry," she whispered as she realised it was late and looked into the back where Henry was similarly passed out.

"It's fine," Emma smiled, "we're nearly there and I just thought that we never discussed..."

"The cuff," Regina said in sudden understanding as she looked at the sign in front of them.

"You don't have to put it on," Emma said, "it's your decision but I thought that now would be the place..."

"You're right," Regina said as she sat up a little straighter as she quickly thought about it before nodding, "I'll put it back on."

"Are you sure?" Emma whispered as she reached into the door pocket and pulled the magic-hindering leather cuff back out.

“Yes, I... I don’t want to take any chances,” she admitted quietly with a nod of the head towards Henry as she took the cuff from Emma and put it on her wrist.

“I don’t like you being defenceless here, not after what you said about some people,” Emma whispered back. On a couple of nights Regina had hinted at some of the more diehard members of Storybrooke and how they still resented her and her actions. Despite Emma’s pleas she had never named names and tried to smooth the whole thing over.

“They won’t know,” Regina said with a shrug.

“Okay but this,” Emma indicated the cuff, “is not a long-term solution.”

“No, it isn’t,” Regina agreed, “but I need to get back to my life and settle back into whatever normal is these days. And then we can make a decision, together.”

Emma flinched, “that’s not my decision to make.”

“You’re the Sheriff,” Regina explained, “is there is a chance that I’m a danger then you need make the right decision for the town, not your girlfriend.”

“I’ll quit,” Emma grumbled as she put the car back into gear.

“Shame,” Regina sighed as she closed her eyes and leaned her head back, “I’ve always liked the badge.”

Chapter 81

Regina tossed and turned sleeplessly and let out a frustrated groan when she looked at the clock to see that it was still the middle of the night. She had hoped that morning was on its way so she could get on with her day, maybe indulge in an impromptu visit to the Sheriff's office but no such luck.

She smiled as she remembered Emma unpacking their cases from the Bug and carrying them upstairs. Henry had hugged Emma tonight and gone straight to bed due to exhaustion from the travel.

Regina had prepared Emma a hot drink and they had made small talk in the kitchen until it really was time for Emma to get back home to her parent's apartment. Regina had actually pouted at the fact that Emma wouldn't be staying the night but of course she understood that Emma wanted to get back to her own bed and fresh clothes that were appropriate for the weather.

The goodbye kiss had become rather heated and when Emma lifted Regina onto the kitchen counter she was certain that she would never let the blonde leave. They hadn't discussed exact plans for Emma's move into Mifflin Street, Emma had said she needed to discuss it with her parents and work out dates.

Regina was positive that Emma's phone ringing was the only thing that stopped them from having sex on the kitchen counter. Of course it had been Snow, worried because she had expected Emma back over an hour ago.

Another look at the clock and Regina groaned in frustration, she was happy to be home but she was missing Florida. Her first vacation had been a huge success and she felt refreshed and happier, her only concern was if those feelings would remain. Life was different in Storybrooke, she was different in Storybrooke. She couldn't be one hundred percent sure that the problems with her magic were over and until she was she would have to wear the leather cuff.

She lifted her arm up and regarded the cuff in the dim light of her alarm clock. What had once been used to subdue her in order to suffer torture was now allowing her to protect her loved ones. She still hated the cuff but she had to admit that she felt more relaxed knowing that if her emotions were to run riot again she wouldn't be able to send Emma flying. The image of that day still haunted her, while she had apologised a hundred times over and Emma had accepted and even laughed it off. The memories still caused her to shiver at how close she had come to permanently damaging or killing the blonde.

Knowing her temper and her tendency to jump to the wrong conclusion she knew that the cuff was the only thing that would be able to keep disaster from happening. It was all too easy for her to fall into her old ways and for the anger within her to rear up and take over the rational side of her mind. While the vacation and the opening up to Emma had certainly helped with her headaches and her demons she knew that damage that serious didn't just go away.

Her life was rapidly changing, she had gone from lonely, depressed, driven to the edge of madness by lack of sleep or nightmares when she did eventually did manage to doze off to being happy, in love and with a new outlook on life. But that didn't mean the underlying issues had gone, just because she had managed to push them to one side didn't mean that she was suddenly all better.

She viewed every step as one in her road to recovery but she knew that road could be very long and she needed an insurance policy, something to make sure she could be controlled and that was the cuff. The invisibility of her PTSD made it harder for her to judge when she was better or even if she ever would actually get to that point.

A quiet beep disturbed her thoughts and she sat up as she noticed her phone light up, picking up the device she noted with a smile that she had a text from Emma.

Missing you

Regina smiled and quickly replied, *missing you too, not sleeping?*

Regina bit her lip as she smiled and felt a familiar happy feeling surging through her body and she wondered how the simple knowledge that Emma also being awake and thinking of her could have such an effect on her.

No, wishing I was back in our bed in the hotel.

Regina hesitated for a moment, not wanting to sound too needy but eventually threw caution to the wind as she typed, when will I see you?

Staring at the screen she waited for a reply remembering to breathe only when she realised she had been holding her breath.

Tonight? My parents wanted Henry to sleep over so he can tell them about the vacation.

Regina chuckled as she wondered how much of that was the Charmings' idea and how much of it was Emma aiming to get some privacy, not that she minded.

Sounds wonderful, if you're staying over tonight you better get your beautiful sleep now. I won't be impressed if you fall asleep before I'm finished with you, Sheriff.

Seconds later Regina received Emma's reply of a yellow face with many z's floating above its head and she laughed as she placed the device back on her bedside table and renewed her effort to sleep.

Chapter 82

Regina looked at her watch and looked up at Henry across the booth in Granny's where they had been eating breakfast, "time to go, Henry," she said softly.

The truth was that Regina wasn't quite ready to relinquish her son back to the school just yet, she had so enjoyed being in his company over the course of the vacation. She briefly wondered how she would go about filling her day until the evening but then sighed as she remembered that Henry was sleeping over at his grandparents that evening, immediately smiling as she remembered that that meant Emma would be all hers.

Henry edged out of the booth and picked up his rucksack and looked at Regina sadly, "you'll be okay on your own, right?"

Regina had to laugh at the young boy double checking that his mother would be okay while he was at school, "yes, I think I'll manage, what do you think I did before you came along?"

She stood up and put her arm over his shoulders as they walked towards the exit, "lived in a cursed town where you terrorised everyone all day every day until you got bored and adopted me?"

Regina looked down at a smiling, cheeky grin looking back up at her and smirked at him, "oh, so you want to stay at your grandparents all week?"

Henry shook his head quickly and put an arm around Regina's back, "I love you, Mom," he said sweetly.

They exited the diner and waited for the yellow school bus to arrive, "Mom, is Emma really going to move in with us?"

"Yes, she really is," Regina smiled down to him, "but maybe not immediately, she has work and she has to pack and she has to discuss it with her parents... but it will happen."

“Awesome,” Henry grinned happily, “will she have the room next to mine?”

Regina’s face fell, “oh, well, er, Henry... the thing is...”

“Gotcha,” Henry fell about laughing just as the bus pulled up and the heavy metal doors crashed open.

She rolled her eyes and pulled him into her arms for a cuddle before giving him a big kiss on the cheek in front of the other children on the bus. She removed the smudged lipstick on his cheek with her thumb, “be careful who you declare war on, Henry,” she winked as he wiped at his cheek and laughed as he climbed aboard the bus.

Once the bus had safely departed Regina looked up the street and let out a small sigh as she walked towards Gold’s shop. As she walked she pulled her coat around her body to keep out the chill and to somehow deflect the looks she was getting from some passers-by. Clearly the town had been aware of her absence and she heard a female voice whispering about unfair fact that she could leave the town while everyone else was condemned to stay.

Quickly crossing the road she distractedly pulled down at her sleeve to ensure that no one would see the cuff and entered Gold’s shop, relieved that the door was unlocked despite the early hour.

At the sound of the bell ringing Gold looked up from some paperwork and smiled, “welcome back, Dearie, enjoy your impromptu vacation?”

Regina reached into her coat pocket and heavily placed something on the counter in front of him. He looked down with a smirk and picked up the item in between his thumb and forefinger and let the keyring hang loosely in the air. It was a rubber depiction of the state of Florida.

“I thought I’d get you a gift,” Regina sniffed, “you know, as you’ll never be able to leave this town and see it for yourself. That and it reminded me of you because it’s shaped like a di...”

“How can I help you, Regina?” Gold smirked as he pocketed the keyring.

She took a deep breath before releasing it again, “you’re aware of my situation I presume?”

Gold nodded, “yes, Miss Swan spoke to me and I have heard... rumours.”

“I need your help,” Regina said as she strolled around the shop and examined the different objects she found there, “currently I am wearing this monstrosity,” she held up her wrist to show Gold the cuff.

“Ah, so that’s why she stole it, to tame the beast,” Gold laughed.

Regina glared at him, “I chose to put it on, it’s the only way I can guarantee that I won’t blow the damn town up.”

Gold regarded her curiously for a moment, “you haven’t ever had this trouble before, what’s different now?”

“It’s personal,” Regina said as she focused her attention on something within a glass display unit.

“So you want me to help you,” Gold said as he ambled over, “but you won’t tell me what the problem is?”

Regina bit the inside of her lip so hard she wondered if it would bleed before finally speaking again, “when I say it’s personal... I mean just that. I can’t explain it, I’m having... trouble... processing some things that have occurred.”

Gold paused for a moment and the smirk slowly eased off of his face, as much as he enjoyed tormenting Regina and playing games with her he still felt a slight guilt for using her to enact his curse. Manipulating her for all those years to get his own way and in the process creating a bitter, miserable life for the woman.

“But the cuff is unmanageable,” Gold commented, “you have no control over it once you are wearing it and thus you are powerless, not a good situation to be in. Certainly not for a former evil queen.”

“Exactly,” Regina muttered as her eyes danced over the contents of the display cabinet, anywhere but looking at Rumple who would surely be gloating any moment now.

“Are the rumours of your attachment to Miss Swan true?” Gold suddenly asked.

Regina’s eyes snapped up and opened her mouth presumably to tell him to mind his own damned business when Gold held up a calming hand, “no judgement, Dearie, merely a question. Miss Swan as a lover, someone you trust, with access to light magic could be the very solution to your problems.”

Regina stared at him coldly for a few moments before nodding, “we... are together,” she said before averting her eyes.

“Then I have a suggestion,” he said with a nod of his head as he snapped his fingers and a spell book appeared in his hand.

Chapter 83

David pulled up the patrol car outside 108 Mifflin Street and quickly jogged up the path and jumped up the steps onto the porch and hammered insistently on the front door with his closed fist.

He waited for a few seconds before hammering again and shouting through the wooden door, “Regina!”

He waited a few more seconds and brought his hand up to knock again when the door flew open and an unimpressed Regina Mills stood in front of him with her hands on her hips, “Charming,” she greeted with a sneer.

David walked towards her, “get inside,” he said quickly and she was forced to take a step backwards and let him in. Once he was in he closed the door and locked it behind him and began to look out of the window beside the window.

“Checking for any witnesses?” Regina questioned though her cocky tone held a hint of fear.

“What?” David asked distractedly as he looked out another window to get a better view.

“For when you kill me, that is what you’re here to do, yes?” Regina folded her arms in a show of bravado.

David spun around with surprise etched on his face, “kill you? I’m here to save you!”

Regina frowned, “save me?”

“Why didn’t you answer your phone?” David asked with a shake of the head before returning to the window again.

“I was in the vault, I only got back ten minutes ago,” Regina explained before shaking her head, “why am I explaining my actions to you? What is going on?”

“Why did you think I wanted to kill you?” David asked her dumbfounded at her previous statement.

“Because I’m sleeping with your daughter?” Regina sassed and smiled at David’s wince as he turned back to look out of the window.

“While I appreciate you gracing me with that mental image,” he shuddered visibly, “I’m not here to kill you, but they are.”

David took a step to one side and Regina approached the window and saw a mob of people from the town crossing the road and coming towards the house.

“One day back from vacation and the rabble are out with their torches and pitchforks, what did I do now?” Regina sighed but even David could tell she was concerned.

“Henry told some of the kids at school that Emma was moving in with you, word spread and now they think you’ve bewitched her somehow,” David explained.

“Well you’re their prince, can’t you go out there and tell them to stand down?” Regina asked, panic creeping into her voice as she could hear the shouts of the mob getting louder.

“I don’t think they’re going to listen to me,” David admitted, “if they think you’ve bewitched Emma then they’ll probably think you’ve done the same to me.”

Regina was about to reply when a loud hammering on the door caused her to jump in fright. David put his arm out and pushed her behind him as he faced the door and slowly walked them backwards into the house and away from the doorway.

“David,” Regina said quietly.

“Yes?” David asked, distracted by the sound of the hammering and shouting from behind the door, the word burn being the word of the day for the mob.

“This isn’t the best time but as I might die I suppose now might be the only time,” Regina said as David guided them up the stairs and drew his gun, his arm still outstretched and protecting Regina behind him.

“Spit it out, Regina,” David gritted out, clearly expecting Regina to reveal yet another skeleton from her extensive closet.

“You and I, we’re traditionalists,” Regina said, pausing when she jumped in fear at a particularly long and loud series of bangs on the door.

“Is this really relevant right now?” David asked.

“So, I’m sure you’ll understand that I wanted to do this properly, it’s an old fashioned formality I suppose but I believe it will be important to you and therefore it’s important to me,” Regina rambled.

“Regina, get to the point,” David said irritably.

“I know it’s early days but my mind is made up,” Regina explained, “and things were different back in the Enchanted Forest, it didn’t take endless months and years before people were ready.”

“Regina, before we die, can you please get to the point?”

“I want your permission to marry your daughter,” Regina said quickly.

David lowered his arm and slowly turned around in shock to face the brunette who wringing her hands and rapidly looking from him to the door that was vibrating in its frame.

“You realise I’m holding a gun?” David said slowly.

“I’m deadly serious,” Regina said sincerely, “I love her, I want to propose to her. Henry and I picked out a ring when we were in Florida, I knew buying one here would spread like wildfire and I wanted to speak to you first.”

David stared at her blankly, “because you’re a traditionalist?”

“More because you are a traditionalist,” Regina admitted.

“Have you asked her?” David asked in confusion.

“Of course not you fool,” Regina rolled her eyes, “I’m asking your permission to ask her, why would I ask her and then I ask you?”

“Right, yes,” David shook his head, “I’m just going to need a while to get my head around this.”

A window broke and both of them turned to see a hand reaching through the broken pane and scrambling for the door handle.

“Well, by all means take your time,” Regina sighed, “would you like me to get you a chair? A cup of tea maybe? A notepad for a pros and cons list? Con, was Evil Queen... that kind of thing? This was a stupid idea, I don’t even know why I’m asking you.”

Regina folded her arms in a sulk and David stared at her with incredulity, “seriously? You’re going to pout now?”

The sound of sirens wailing echoed outside and David and Regina looked up as the faint sign of flashing lights echoed around the hallway.

“Emma’s here,” David said.

Regina shouldered him out of the way and David grabbed her arm.

“Where are you going?”

“They might hurt Emma,” Regina replied as she pulled at his grip in vain, “they want me.”

“If I let you out of that door Emma will kill me,” David laughed, “she sent me here to keep you in here and out of harm’s way until she could get here herself.”

“But they’ll...” Regina argued.

“Snow and Emma will sort it out,” David said, “have faith.”

Regina stopped struggling and they both stopped and listened to what was happening on the other side of the door. While they couldn’t make out exactly what was being said Snow’s soft tones and Emma’s barked orders could be vaguely heard along with the odd argument from a member of the mob.

David put his gun back in its holster and regarded Regina as she attempted to listen to what was being said outside, “I didn’t think you’d ever want to marry again.”

Regina looked at him and casually shrugged, “I don’t have anything against the institution itself. My marriage was... difficult but I didn’t have the opportunity to marry for love like you did.”

David nodded, “I have some understanding of being forced to marry someone you don’t love, I was lucky I guess.”

Snow’s voice started to raise and despite not hearing the words she said both of them knew that she berating the mob and showing her ashamed she was by their actions.

“So, you really love her,” David said.

“I really do,” Regina agreed, a little cagey as she still had no idea what David would say.

David nodded, “last night, when she got home, I’ve never seen her so happy. And it wasn’t just the glow of coming home from some time away, it seemed that she’d found herself. But it...” he searched for the word as she gripped the air with his hands, “it... kinda hurt to see.”

Regina frowned as she whispered, “how so?”

“It made me realise that in all the time I’ve known her, I’ve never seen her really happy,” David admitted, his voice thick with emotion, “Snow saw it too.”

“I’m sorry,” Regina bowed her head, they both knew she was apologising for casting the curse that ripped him away from his daughter for all those years.

“Yes,” David said with a nod.

Regina kept her head bowed, expecting a further berating from the man and when nothing came she looked up with a raised eyebrow.

“Yes, you have my permission,” David reiterated.

Regina smiled in a way that David had never seen before and he was blown away by how it lit up the room, “thank you,” she whispered as a small tear escaped and tracked its way down her face.

“I assume we’ll keep this between you and I until you pop the question?” David asked with a grin.

“Yes, please,” Regina nodded quickly, “I’m not sure how to go about it. Or when, obviously it’s very fast and we both know what Emma is like.”

David nodded his understanding, “you have my blessing, Snow’s too,” he smiled.

A more civil knock on the door followed by Emma’s worried voice calling Regina’s name broke them from their thoughts and Regina rushed to open the door. The mod had dissipated and Snow stood on the porch with a pale pink knitted beret on her head and a crossbow borrowed from Granny in her hands. Emma launched herself at Regina and pulled her into a tight hug, “thank God you’re okay,” she whispered into brunette locks.

“I’m fine,” Regina held her, “I had a nice chat with your father.”

Chapter 84

Emma held onto Regina tightly and seemingly refused to let go and Regina looked helplessly at David and Snow who were watching as their daughter gripped her girlfriend. Regina had brought her arms around Emma and held her just as tightly in support.

“They won’t be back in a hurry,” Snow nodded to David.

“What did you say?” David asked her.

“I told them that they should be ashamed of themselves for resorting to violence and that I knew Regina had changed and they needed to trust me,” Snow said confidently.

“And that worked?” Regina snorted a laugh.

“Well, they left,” Snow pointed out with a shrug.

“Where’s Henry?” Regina asked as Emma finally started to let go of her to instead examine Regina to check she was indeed in one piece.

“He’s with Ruby,” Snow said, “I thought the diner would be safe for him.”

Regina nodded her agreement, “does... does Henry know that his telling his school friends about Emma caused... this?”

Snow shook her head, “no, he doesn’t even know that they were here. We just told him something had come up but kept your name out of it.”

“Good,” Regina nodded, “I don’t want him to worry...”

“Do you still want us to take him tonight?” David asked Regina.

“Yes!” Emma butted in quickly, “it might not be safe here.”

“Of course it’s safe here,” Regina rolled her eyes.

Emma glared at her, “they had weapons, they broke your window and they were about to get through the door!”

“Your mother seems to think they won’t return,” Regina reminded her.

“And you didn’t seem that convinced by that,” Emma replied.

Regina ignored Emma and addressed Snow and David, “I think we should stick to the plan and Henry should stay with you tonight, otherwise he will know that something has happened and I don’t want to worry him.”

Snow nodded, “I’ll go and get him from the diner before he hears anything,” she said as she slung the heavy crossbow over her shoulder and started to walk down the path.

David looked from Regina to Emma, “if you need anything then give me a call.”

“We will, thank you, David,” Regina said with a smile as the man followed his wife down the path and away from the house.

If Emma thought it was odd that Regina and David were being civil to each other she didn’t have time to notice as she grabbed Regina’s arm and pulled her into the house and closed and locked the door behind her.

After checking the door was locked Emma turned to Regina and grabbed her arm and pulled up her sleeve to reveal the leather cuff, “okay, how... how do we get this off again? I imagine it being gone right?”

Regina snatched her arm away from Emma, “what are you doing?”

Emma stared at her as if she had asked the most ridiculous question she had ever heard, “I’m removing the cuff so you can defend yourself! What if they come back? What if they attack you when you’re alone? Or out somewhere and there’s nothing you can do?”

“Emma,” Regina stepped forward and cupped the blonde’s face carefully in her hands, “we have no guarantee that my magic is stable, we can’t remove the cuff...”

“Yes, we damn well can,” Emma pulled out of Regina’s hold, “they could kill you, these people are fucking crazy. I need to know you can protect yourself.”

“Emma,” Regina tried again but stopped as Emma grabbed her arm again and focused on the leather cuff and bit her lip in concentration, “Emma, this could be a bad idea...”

“Don’t care,” Emma whispered tersely while she focused on her goal, “I believe in you.”

“I appreciate that,” Regina admitted with a soft smile as she brought her free hand up to brush long blonde locks away from Emma’s face, “but you can’t know that my magic is stable, that I’m stable enough to be trusted with my magic again.”

The cuff suddenly fell to the floor and Emma pumped her fist in delight, “yeah!”

Regina rolled her eyes and gently pulled her hand back as Emma bent down to pick up the cuff and stuffed it into the pocket of her leather jacket.

“Try it,” Emma suggested, “do some magic.”

Regina huffed for a moment until her eyes met with the broken window and the shards of glass. Her eyes narrowed at the vandalism and with a wave of her hand the window was replaced and the shards of glass all vanished.

“How did that feel?” Emma asked carefully, “everything okay?”

Regina nodded slowly as she examined her outstretched hands with interest, “yes, it appears to be in check.”

“Good,” Emma smiled as she pulled Regina into another hug, “I can’t tell you how frightened I was when I got David’s call.”

“I can’t believe you sent your father to babysit me,” Regina rested her head on Emma’s shoulder as she revelled in the embrace.

“Only because I know you and I knew you’d be on that doorstep attempting to shout them down,” Emma laughed but her embrace tightened as the thought of the outcome of that action filled her mind.

Regina gave Emma a final squeeze before she pulled away and took Emma’s arm and gently pulled her into the study, “come on, you need to sit down,” Regina told her firmly.

In the study Regina sat Emma down on the sofa, “can I get you a drink, something to eat?”

Emma looked up at the brunette and nodded slowly, “I kinda didn’t have time for lunch...”

Regina rolled her eyes, “I’m not going to lecture you about missing meals...”

“Sounds like you already are,” Emma pointed out quietly.

“You need to look after yourself,” Regina told her but then closed her eyes and took a deep breath, “I’ll make you something to eat... I’ll be back shortly.”

“Can you just wave something up,” Emma asked as she waved her hands around to demonstrate Regina magicking something up.

“I don’t think that’s wise until I can be certain that my magic is back to normal,” Regina said quietly.

“Okay,” Emma nodded, not wanting to push the brunette too far, “then, let me help?”

“No,” Regina put her hand up to stop Emma from sitting up, “you stay here and... put your feet up and I’ll get you something to eat.”

Emma smiled and nodded, “I could get used to this,” she said as she leaned back on the sofa.

“I hope you do,” Regina muttered under her breath as she left the room.

“What was that?” Emma asked.

“Nothing, dear,” Regina smiled.

Chapter 85

It took two rounds of sandwiches and several small cupcakes that Regina quickly made to not only satiate Emma's hunger but to also calm her down. Regina smiled from her armchair as Emma picked up another cupcake and peeled off the paper wrapper and bit it in half.

"These are delicious," Emma mumbled with her mouth full.

"Thank you," Regina acknowledged as she idly stirred her spoon in her teacup.

"I can't believe you just decided to bake cakes," Emma chuckled as she ate the other half of the cupcake.

"Five minutes to whisk the ingredients together and ten minutes to bake them," Regina shrugged, "hardly an effort."

Emma nodded as she considered that fact, "I suppose that's a mom thing I never experienced."

"I'm sure you will one day," Regina said without thinking before quickly adding, "what with your mother being pregnant."

Emma looked a little startled until she registered the second half of Regina's sentence and then nodded her agreement, "yeah, I'm sure Snow White bakes cupcakes all the time."

"She did when I raised her," Regina said as she took a sip of her tea.

Emma shook her head, "it's just weird to think of that."

"Imagine how I feel," Regina shuddered a little.

The sound of rain started to hit the window of the study and Emma looked towards the window behind the desk and sighed, "I forgot we were supposed

to have a storm this evening.”

“Were you planning on doing something outside?” Regina asked.

“No,” Emma chuckled, “I suppose not, it just means it gets dark earlier.”

Regina grinned as she looked at Emma, “does that mean we can go to bed sooner?”

Emma looked from the window to Regina with a wide grin, “you’re sex-crazed, not that I mind... in fact quite the opposite!”

Regina shrugged with a lopsided grin, “when you find something you enjoy doing you want to indulge frequently. Unless you don’t want to in which case we can...”

“Oh, no,” Emma interrupted with a smile, “there is nothing I’d rather do, I missed you last night.”

Regina put her cup and saucer on the coffee table as she stood up and sat next to Emma on the sofa, brushing a few stray blonde locks back, “I missed you too.”

“I told David and Mary Margaret that I’m moving in with you,” Emma said as she enjoyed the feel of Regina’s fingers tangling in her hair.

“And? Were they appalled?” Regina joked lightly.

“No, relieved,” Emma laughed, “I think they want the room back and outta sight outta mind!”

Regina frowned, “what do you mean?”

“Well, if I was still living there and I didn’t come home one night because I stayed over here then that is a pretty big indication that I was getting some,” she waggled her eyebrows, “if you know what I mean.”

“Ah,” Regina said in understanding, “and your parents’ delicate sensibilities would be rattled if they knew you were fucking their former

enemy?"

Emma swallowed, "I love it when you talk dirty," she admitted.

"Why do you think I do it?" Regina smiled as she leaned forward and kissed Emma firmly on the lips, her mouth opening immediately and intensifying the kiss. Emma hungrily pulled Regina closer to her and sought out Regina's tongue with her own.

Before long they were both breathless and pulled away to pant for air, Regina roamed her hands up and down Emma's sides and she asked "shall we take this upstairs?"

"What's wrong with right here?" Emma asked as she quickly pushed Regina back against the back of the sofa and swung her legs over to straddle the brunette, "after having you any time I want I've been spoilt and last night was a long night."

Regina's hands found Emma's hips as the blonde leant down and captured her mouth again and kissed Regina with a passion that was quickly taking over her senses. As Regina mindlessly attempted to grab onto Emma's hips, which were currently rocking against Regina's stomach, she began to understand something and quickly tore her lips away from Emma's.

"Your magic," Regina breathed.

"Thanks," Emma grinned with pride.

"No, you're using your magic," Regina clarified.

"No, I'm not," Emma frowned.

"You are," Regina said, "I can feel it coming off of you in waves."

"Oh," Emma looked confused, "is that a bad thing?"

"Well, no, but it's intense," Regina admitted.

"What am I doing exactly?" Emma asked, still confused.

“You...” Regina gasped, “that!”

“You felt that?!” Emma looked down at the brunette in surprise.

“Yes!” Regina gasped again.

“But I’m just thinking it,” Emma explained as she thought it again and smiled as Regina bucked.

“Magic, dear,” Regina explained with a gulp, “it’s emotion, remember.”

“Is this normal?” Emma asked, wanting to check that she wasn’t about to break her girlfriend.

“I don’t know,” Regina admitted, “I’ve never been intimate with another magic user.”

Emma nodded and in her mind she pictured sucking on Regina’s sensitive nipples and laughed as Regina arched off of the sofa and groaned in pleasure, “fuck, Regina, if I knew it would be like this I would have come home sooner... oh! God!”

Emma bucked upwards and leant forward and braced herself against the back of the sofa, “Regina! Oh! OH!”

“How do you like that back?” Regina grinned as she watched the blonde above her writhing in ecstasy. She eased up on the sensations and waited for Emma to be able to form words again, “truce?”

Emma took a few deep breaths and looked down at Regina, “no fucking way,” she whispered as she tried her best to imagine Regina having an orgasm. She used the mental images of the last few days and overlaid the feelings she experienced within her own body when she came and pushed all of that emotion towards Regina.

Regina’s body tensed and then started to shake as her eyes fluttered close at the powerful feelings overtaking her body, “stop,” she whispered with a smile on her face.

Emma immediately stopped, “are you okay?”

“Yes,” Regina nodded quickly to dispel Emma’s concern. She regulated her breathing again, “very okay, I just want you to be touching me when that happens.”

Emma smiled, “I need to keep a lid on it, eh?”

Regina nodded her agreement, “I think we both need to practice some restraint.”

As the rain outside had become heavier darkness had started to fall within the unlit study. Emma looked towards the window knowing that if they put any lights on in the study then they would be seen by anyone who happened to be outside, remembering the mob and worried about a lone vigilante Emma looked at Regina and smiled, “shall we take this to the bedroom where we can take our time?”

Regina nodded and Emma quickly swung her legs off of Regina and stood up and offered the brunette her hand. Once Regina was upright she spoke again, “oh yes, one other thing,” she said thoughtfully, “I need to report some vandalism.”

Emma detected the joking tone in Regina’s voice and played along, “oh yes? I’m glad you reported this, what’s been vandalised, Ma’am?”

Regina walked over to the calendar that hung beside her desk and plucked it off of the wall, “I noticed this last night,” she said as she flipped to the month of February and showed Emma.

Emma looked at the photograph of herself, naked save for some strategically placed yellow police tape and the handwritten note beneath it that she had herself left for Regina.

For personal recreation of this crime scene please call Sheriff Swan

Emma nodded and looked up at Regina, attempting to hide her own smile of delight at the knowledge that Regina had been looking at the photograph

the night before. A flash of lightning filled the room as Emma asked, “seems like you caught me, will you be pressing charges, Ma’am?”

Regina simply held out her free hand, palm up and Emma watched as a small cloud of purple mist appeared and disappeared revealing a roll of yellow police tape.

Chapter 86

As the storm raged outside 108 Mifflin Street the two women were completely unaware of the rain lashing against the bedroom window and the sporadic lightning which illuminated the sky as they were too engrossed in each other.

Regina had taken another direction with the yellow police tape and was in the process of wrapping the latex tape around Emma's already bound wrists and attaching them to the top of her headboard. After a heavy make-out session they had both stripped the other down to bra and panties and when Regina pushed Emma down on the bed and straddled the blonde's hips she decided to recreate something she had seen on television late one night many years before.

They had both attempted to control their magic after their overexcitement in the study but it was difficult and on occasion both women found themselves gasping in pleasure at a phantom desires they couldn't quite place. Usually it was Emma's untrained abilities that started to get out of control and Regina simply paid the favour back in some warped sense of competition.

Once Emma's hands were bound together and restrained against the headboard Regina returned to straddling Emma's hips with a smug grin and waggled her eyebrows as Emma pulled against the restraints.

“Oh no,” Emma said without conviction, “whatever will I do now?”

Regina held the roll of tape in one hand and pulled the end of the tape with the other hand, satisfied at the loud noise it made as it unrolled, “I suggest you remain quiet or I’ll have to wrap this around that pretty little mouth of yours.”

Emma looked up at Regina in her red silk bra with the latex yellow tape in her hands and bit her lip in anticipation, “but you like my mouth,” Emma pouted.

“True,” Regina allowed as she tossed the tape beside Emma on the bed and leaned down to rest the full length of her body along the blonde and kissed her. Emma pulled against the restraints, momentarily forgetting that she was unable to wrap the beautiful woman on top of her up in her arms.

In lieu of being able to hold Regina she put as much feeling into the kiss as she could and enthusiastically ran her tongue along Regina’s. Emma’s hips began to strain upwards to meet Regina’s in an ineffective attempt to gratify the growing tension between her legs.

Regina pulled away and raised her eyebrow, “do I really have to tie your legs up as well?”

“How very fifty shades of you,” Emma winked.

Regina rolled her eyes, “I hope you’re not going to associate our lovemaking with that trash, dear.”

Emma twisted her head awkwardly before sighing, “my chin itches.”

With a shake of the head Regina gently scratched Emma’s chin, “I think we’ve been demoted to twenty shades of grey.”

Emma smiled at the feel of her chin itch being satisfied, “okay, I’m good now, you can tie my legs up if you like now?”

Regina laughed, “you’re keen.”

Emma laughed and shrugged as best she could with her arms tied up, “I like it kinky.”

“It appears I do too,” Regina grinned as she repositioned herself between Emma’s legs and slid a little way down Emma’s body so her stomach came into contact with Emma’s now damp panties. Emma gasped at the contact and Regina waved her hand over Emma’s chest and the white lace bra vanished.

“Neat trick,” Emma said, impressed.

Regina sat up on her knees between Emma's legs and snapped her fingers and a moment later Emma's legs were spread and tied with the yellow police tape to each corner of the bed.

"Fuck that's hot," Emma whispered as she tentatively pulled against the strain of the tape with a grin on her face which vanished as she suddenly let out a sneeze.

"Ew, could you get me a tissue?" Emma asked with a wince.

Regina plucked a tissue from the box on the bedside table and held it under Emma's nose and with a barely concealed laugh requested, "blow."

Emma did and Regina disposed of the used tissue, "never mind fifty shades of grey, it's more like two shades of off-white."

Emma laughed and blushed, "I'm sorry, not very sexy, eh?"

"On the contrary," Regina said as she returned to her position kneeling in between Emma's spread legs, "I feel one hundred percent comfortable with you, there's no expectations, no rules, just you and I enjoying each other. It's perfect."

Emma beamed happily, "that's exactly how I feel too."

"Good," Regina said, her tone taking a deeper quality, "that being said," she placed a hand on either side of Emma's side and leaned her mouth over one of Emma's soft breasts, "let's get on with it."

Emma threw her head back in pleasure as Regina's mouth captured the nipple and started to alternate between gentle flicks, teasing bites and wet kisses. Regina balanced her weight on one hand and brought the other up to massage Emma's other breast and Emma pulled her arms heavily against the latex tape.

"Oh, God, Regina... yes... that feels so good..." Emma whispered with her eyes tightly shut and her hips rocking up against the older woman's stomach.

Regina quickly switched her mouth to the other breast and brought her other hand up to play with the now wet breast, tweaking the nipple roughly.

“Yes!” Emma gasped loudly as she distantly realised that Regina was undulating her stomach against her covered core, “yes, please... Regina... yes...”

“Stop talking,” Regina growled as she pulled her lips away from Emma’s breast with a low pop and climbed up Emma’s body like a stalking predator and captured her lips with her own to silence her.

Emma pulled hard on her arm restraints, desperately wanting to hold the brunette but paused when she realised that one of Regina’s hands was suspended above her panties.

Regina bit at Emma’s bottom lip as she pulled away and looked at Emma with darkened eyes, “is this what you want?”

Emma gave a quick nod which caused Regina’s hand to quickly move under the material and graze past Emma’s hardened clit.

“Fuck!” Emma gasped at the pleasure, her legs straining against the restraints as she attempted to raise her hips to meet Regina’s hand.

“Patience,” Regina whispered as she used her body weight to keep Emma’s hips down.

“Regina... please...” Emma begged.

“Shh,” Regina whispered soothingly as she ran her fingers through Emma’s soaking folds to redistribute the copious amounts of fluid she found there. Emma tossed her head from one side to the other in frustration as she bit her lip and let out soft gasps as Regina teased her mercilessly.

As Regina’s fingers lazily stroked along Emma’s folds, carefully avoiding both entrance and clit, her mouth focused on trailing kisses around Emma’s neck and chest. Each time she passed over Emma’s heart she grinned at the racing organ she could feel pounding underneath the warm skin.

Deciding that enough was enough Regina magicked herself off of Emma's body so she was laying between Emma's forcibly spread legs, at the same moment she vanished Emma's thoroughly soaked panties and, in the same second, she pressed her open mouth onto Emma's pussy.

"YES!" Emma cried out as she opened her eyes and looked down at Regina's face buried between her legs, the brunette's lips greedily sucking on Emma's clit. Emma rode her hips in order to grind her core into Regina's welcoming mouth and cried out repeatedly in ecstasy at the sensations rushing through her body.

Emma could feel the resolution to Regina's actions rushing closer and suddenly her hands were free, the latex tape removed and she swiftly placed them on the back of Regina's head as she sat up and panted for breath. The sensations starting in-between her legs were spreading rapidly throughout her body with an intensity that she had never felt before and as she cracked an eyelid apart she saw a soft white glow emanating from her fingers which were threaded in Regina's hair. Even though she realised she was using her magic she also knew she had no chance of stopping it, she was too far gone and the pleasure was too all-consuming.

Clenching, she felt herself hovering over the peak about to fall into gratification but even that seemed to take forever as the anticipation grew and grew and Regina continued her skilful ministrations. Suddenly it hit and it hit hard, Emma was screaming Regina's name until all the air was gone from her lungs and her vocal chords were no longer responding. Shaking uncontrollably she only barely noticed Regina wrapping her arms around her hips in an attempt to keep her still. Floods of moisture fell from her as she continued to shake uncontrollably, the pleasure stretching on and on like she had never felt before.

Emma remembered thinking that an orgasm of that magnitude should probably have killed her or at least knocked her out for several minutes but all she could feel was an increasing desire. As Regina finally lifted her head from between Emma's legs something snapped in Emma and she realised she was accessing her magic on impulse.

In the next moment they had switched positions, Regina was on her back and naked while looking slightly confused as Emma lay between the brunette's legs and no longer restrained by any tape. Emma insatiably ate at Regina's pussy with a thirst for more and more, in the back of her mind she realised she was continuing to use her own magic.

Regina bucked with pleasure, "Emma, oh, what... oh, don't stop," the brunette cried out as her arms flailed about still in shock at Emma suddenly ravishing her and the feeling of Emma's light magic coursing through her body.

Emma hooked her hands over Regina's bucking thighs and pulled the brunette to her, raising her hips from the bed and licking and sucking hungrily at Regina's wet core. She distantly understood that the lights were flickering uncontrollably and opened her eyes to see that the bed was floating slightly off of the ground but that didn't stop her hunger and she kept up the relentless pace as Regina thrust and bucked.

Suddenly Regina was coming with a scream of Emma's name, her body shaking and her pussy grinding into Emma's accepting mouth. Emma kept up the pace as her girlfriend screamed in pleasure and levitated off of the bed, Emma grabbed on to pull her back down at the same moment all the lights went out and the bed slammed back down to the floor.

The sound of panting breaths was all that could be heard in the dark room and after several minutes Regina's shaky voice broke the silence, "E-Emma?"

"Yeah?" Emma breathed.

"I think I blew the lights," Regina whispered through gasps.

"What a compliment," Emma chuckled as she climbed up the bed to lay beside Regina and pull her into her arms, "I think I used my magic," she joked.

Regina laughed, "yes, I'd say you did!"

Emma laughed as well until she suddenly realised something, “your alarm clock is off.”

Regina turned her head to the direction where the faint glow of numbers usually lit up the room, “oh God, don’t tell me I blew the power.”

Emma was off of the bed and walking towards the window before Regina finished the sentence, “erm, Regina?... all the lights in the street are out...”

“You’re kidding,” Regina said as she stumbled out of bed and followed Emma to the window. Looking out of the window they could see the streetlights and all other house lights in the area were out.

“Oh my God,” Regina muttered, “I took out all of Storybrooke.”

“Sweet,” Emma laughed.

“No, they’ll kill me,” Regina shook her head as she strained to look around the street.

“We’ll blame the storm,” Emma shrugged, “who’s going to think otherwise?”

In the dim moonlight Regina turned to face Emma with a worried expression on her face that soon crumbled as they both began giggling at the realisation of what they had done.

Chapter 87

Regina stared out of the window at the darkness in shock and disbelief that she had managed to somehow knock out all of the power in Storybrooke. It was only when Emma put wrapped her up in strong arms that Regina realised that she was still unsteady from their lovemaking. Emma guided her back to the bed, “come on, let’s not stand by the window naked, everyone’s seen what I’ve got on offer but you’re mine.”

“Is there another, more graphic, calendar that I don’t know about?” Regina raised her eyebrow.

“No, but there’s not a lot left to the imagination,” Emma winked.

As Emma lowered Regina gently onto the edge of the bed the sound of a phone ringing sounded in the room.

Emma located her jacket on the floor in amongst other items of clothing and looked towards Regina, “it’s Mary Margaret.”

The light from the screen illuminated Regina’s concerned face as Emma answered the call, “hey, power out there too, huh?”

Regina watched as Emma casually paced the room while picking up her clothes and making noises of agreement until she finally said, “sure, we’ll meet you there,” before hanging up the phone.

“We?” Regina asked with worry.

“Yes, we,” Emma replied as she looked around, “where’s my underwear?”

Regina shrugged, “I magicked your bra away.”

“So where’s it now?” Emma queried.

“Away,” Regina clarified, “what does she want with me?”

“I kinda need some underwear,” Emma said as she explored the room.

Regina waved her hand and a clean bra and pair of panties appeared on Emma, “what does she want with me?”

Emma looked down at her body, “this is going to take some getting used to,” she mumbled before looking up at Regina, “you’re the ex-Mayor she wants your help getting the power back. Or the emergency generator, whatever’s easiest.”

Regina folded her arms, “doesn’t she have that surly dwarf for that kind of thing?”

Emma stopped hopping about the room with one leg in her jeans and looked at Regina curiously, “what’s wr... she doesn’t know, you know that right? She doesn’t suspect that you had anything to do with this.”

“But I did,” Regina responded distantly.

“You’re worried about your magic again, aren’t you?” Emma said in understanding.

“Look at what I did!” Regina said as she stood up and gestured around the room, “well, you can’t see it because everything’s dark but that’s beside the point!”

Emma pulled her jeans on and jumped around on the spot to squeeze her body into the tight-fitting fabric, “no one got hurt, you just... overloaded the breakers or something... it’s our secret.”

“Why do our secrets seem to revolve around you keeping my mistakes from people?” Regina asked as she quietly trailed past Emma and opened a chest of drawers to pull some clothing out for herself.

Emma rolled her eyes at Regina’s mood, “well, looks like I am taking a surly dwarf to help with the power problem.”

Regina spun around and glared at Emma, “I am not a dwarf.”

Emma grinned, “you’re not exactly tall,” she countered as she finished pulling her sweater on and approached the door to the bedroom, “I’ll meet you downstairs.”

Emma was pretty sure she heard the sound of something hit the door after she left and simply smiled, she was getting better and better at reading Regina’s moods and knowing when she was simply moody as opposed to something more serious.

Twenty minutes later Emma and Regina arrived at the generator room to see Mary Margaret bathed in dim emergency lighting and reading an instruction manual with a confused expression until she saw Regina enter the room.

“Oh thank God,” Mary Margaret sighed as she gestured towards the generator, “any ideas?”

Regina lifted her hand and flipped a couple of switches before pulling on a large lever. The main ceiling lights came on and the sound of machinery whirring back to life filled the room, along with the sound of Mary Margaret excitedly clapping her hands.

“Are you sure I can’t convince you to take over as Mayor again?” Mary Margaret asked seriously.

“I don’t think so, dear,” Regina shook her head.

“How about part time?” Mary Margaret pushed.

“You want me to job share... with you?” Regina looked horrified.

Emma elbowed Regina in the ribs as she smiled at Mary Margaret, “she’ll have a think about it.”

“No, I won’t,” Regina groused.

Emma stared at Regina meaningfully, “you will think about it.”

Regina opened her mouth to argue but then closed it again and nodded and addressed Mary Margaret through clenched teeth, “I will apparently think about it.”

Mary Margaret nodded happily, “wonderful, I’ll get Leroy to have a look into the problem first thing in the morning, how long with the generator last?”

“Three days until it needs to be refuelled,” Regina commented, “beyond that it can run as long as it needs to.”

“Great, well, I better get back... sorry to interrupt your evening,” Mary Margaret said with a wink that disturbed both other women as she left.

As soon as she was gone Regina looked at Emma and put her hands on her hips as she demanded, “I’ll think about it will I?”

Emma rolled her eyes, “look, at the moment your visibility in the town is zero and no one wants a repeat of what happened today, yesterday... whatever. If we can show people that you are different and get you involved in running the town and helping people they will start to see what I see.”

Regina’s face softened a little, “oh...”

“I think it will be good for you to get out of the house as well, you literally built this town. No one knows it better than you and no one can run it better than you can,” Emma pointed out as she linked arms with the brunette and guided her outside.

“But, my magic,” Regina said quietly.

“Can be contained with the cuff until we think of something else,” Emma promised, “trust me, I really think this will be good for you. Good for us.”

“Us?” Regina smiled.

“Yes,” Emma grinned, “us.”

They stepped out into the rain and hurried into Emma’s bug, once inside Regina turned to Emma and placed her hand on the blonde’s thigh to stop her

from starting the car.

“There’s... another way to control my magic,” Regina said as she stared down at the foot well distractedly.

“Okay?” Emma asked with a frown as she covered Regina’s hand with her own supportively.

“It’s a lot to ask,” Regina admitted as her eyes slowly looked up at Emma’s.

Emma smiled at Regina and squeezed her hand to encourage her to continue, “it,” Regina started and then stopped as she took a deep breath, “it involves linking my magic to you, allowing you to control my magic no matter where you are.”

Emma looked surprised, “what?”

Regina snatched her hand back, “forget it, it’s foolish.”

“No,” Emma shook her head to get herself together, “sorry, I... I just wanted expecting that... sorry, go on...”

A knock on Emma’s window scared both woman and they both jumped and let out a little cry of shock until Ruby’s apologetic face smiled at them, “sorry!”

Emma wound down the window and took in the dishevelled and soaked waitress’s appearance, “bad night for a walk, Rubes!”

“Ha, ha,” Ruby said without humour, “my car broke down, can you help?”

“Sure,” Emma nodded as she got out of the car and pushed the driver’s seat forward to give Ruby access to get into the back of the Bug.

Chapter 88

It was a couple of hours later when Emma returned to 108 Mifflin Street and finally used the key that Regina had given her on her birthday to let herself into the house. It was still the middle of the night so she crept into the house and kicked off her boots and shrugged her leather jacket off.

After dropping Regina back at the house she took Ruby back to where her car had broken down over the other end of town and between them they had managed to jump-start the car and get it back to the diner. Ruby had been so grateful that she had let Emma into the diner to have something to eat and drink and they had caught up on what Emma had missed while she had been on vacation.

But throughout the conversation Emma's mind had been on what Regina had said before Ruby had interrupted them, she had no idea what Regina meant when she said linking magic but she was intent on finding out. She quickly made her way up the stairs and softly opened the door to the master bedroom in an effort to not awaken Regina.

“I’m awake,” Regina’s voice sounded in the darkness as Emma attempted to creep about.

“Sorry if I woke you,” Emma apologised.

“I couldn’t sleep,” Regina admitted as she sat up and switched the bedside lamp on.

Emma looked at the black silk nightgown-clad brunette with a smirk, “what?” Regina asked her.

“You look like a model, you’ve been laying down trying to sleep and the second you sit up you look like that,” Emma said waving her hand in Regina’s direction.

Regina blushed, “thank you...”

Emma walked around to the other side of the bed and climbed under the covers while still fully dressed and say next to Regina, “so... you were saying...”

Regina looked down at her hands that were in her lap and hesitantly spoke, “I shouldn’t have mentioned it.”

“Of course you should,” Emma smiled, “tell me what it’s all about.”

Regina sighed, “Gold mentioned it, I looked it up in some texts from my vault and the imp was right.”

“About us linking magic?” Emma asked.

“Nearly,” Regina admitted, “it’s a one-way enterprise, linking my magic to yours. It goes back to a time centuries ago when a powerful couple ruled a faraway kingdom, they were both magic users but one of them was unstable following a fall from a horse. It enabled the other to control their magic if they needed to.”

“So,” Emma considered it, “I could stop your magic if it was going haywire?”

“Essentially, yes,” Regina nodded, “but it’s a huge obligation, you shouldn’t have to take that responsibility on.”

“Would it hurt you?” Emma asked seriously.

“No, you would just be able to contain my magic and disperse it safely,” Regina said and shook her head as she realised Emma was considering it, “but it’s not up for discussion.”

“Are you not sure about it because you’re worried about the responsibility it will put on me or because I will ultimately have control over you?” Emma asked carefully before adding, “I won’t judge, anyone would have reservations about that.”

Regina shook her head, “I trust you, as much as it surprises me to admit it, I would give you that control.”

“And it would mean you wouldn’t have to wear the cuff anymore?” Emma clarified, “you’d be able to defend yourself if anything happened?”

“It’s not that simple,” Regina insisted as she turned to face Emma, “it’s permanent, it can’t be undone.”

Emma’s face fell, “a...and... you, you would give me that control over your magic? Over you?”

Regina frowned, “of course I would.”

“Do you have any idea how much that means to me?” Emma said with a disbelieving smile.

“I told you I trust you,” Regina shrugged.

“Trusting someone and giving them that kind of power are two very different things,” Emma insisted, “Regina, I want to do this for you. I hate that you have a choice between being powerless or worried about losing control. This solves those problems.”

“You understand that this is permanent? This is a big request,” Regina pushed.

“I’m not going anywhere,” Emma smiled, “how does it work?”

“Well, there’s a potion,” Regina said, “and a spell, then you will be able to sense when I am using magic. Over time you can train that so you will only be aware when I am using a certain amount of magic, a destructive amount, and then you will be able to access your own magic in order to suppress mine.”

Emma nodded as she considered it, “cool, let’s do it.”

Regina regarded Emma seriously for a few moments before taking a deep breath, “well, I... I wasn’t going to do this now but it seems like a good time,” she said as she got out of bed and opened the top drawer of her chest of drawers and retrieved something from the back.

Emma looked at her with a frown but didn't speak as Regina held something behind her back as she took a hesitant step back towards the bed and stood formally as she appeared to attempt to formulate her words.

"In the short time we've been together," Regina started, her eyes firmly fixed on the bedsheets rather than Emma, "you've changed my life for the better. Things were very different back in the Enchanted Forest, marriages were usually arranged and dating was a foreign concept. You didn't have the luxury of getting to know your lifelong partner."

With a swallow Regina looked up at the ceiling as if attempting to find some strength from the intricate light fitting, "you resigned yourself to the fact that you would have little time to make a connection, if one was to be made at all. That has always stayed with me, I'm quick to make my mind up on things, on people."

Regina lowered her eyes to inquisitive green ones and smiled nervously, "I know that it's very early on in our relationship but I know that spending a day or a decade getting to know you I will come to the same conclusion. You're the one I want to spend my life with," she brought her hands out from behind her back to reveal a small black velvet box.

"I told Henry of my intentions when we were in Florida and he agreed," she snapped the box open to reveal a white gold ring, "he even helped me to pick this ring when we were out buying your birthday presents. During the siege on the house yesterday I asked your father for permission to have your hand in marriage and he, somewhat surprisingly, gave his blessing."

Emma's mouth fell open in speechless surprise and Regina wondered if the blonde would run for the door at any moment now.

"I know this is not normal for your world, I know this is not the usual protocol and little time has passed but I have never felt happier to spend time with someone and I know this is how I want to spend the rest of my life. I know you will probably need time to make a decision and I understand and respect that but I wanted you to know the extent of my feelings," Regina explained softly.

“Yes,” Emma breathed.

Regina nodded in understanding, “take all the time you need...”

“No, not yes I need more time,” Emma explained, “yes I’ll marry you!”

It was Regina’s turn to look shocked, “r-really?”

“Yes!” Emma said as she quickly exited the bed and pulled Regina into a tight embrace.

“You’ll marry me?” Regina questioned for absolute clarity.

Emma pulled back and held Regina’s face in her hands, “yes, Regina Mills, I, Emma Swan will marry you.”

Regina pulled Emma into her arms as emotions overcame her. And the lightbulb in the bedside lamp blew.

Chapter 89

When Emma finally woke up the next morning it took her a few moments to realise that she was in the master bedroom of Mifflin Street but from there recollection came quickly. The loss of power to the town, the agreement of the Emma being Regina's magic safeguard and, best of all, Regina's proposal.

Emma lifted her hand up to look at the beautiful white gold band with an expensive looking square-cut diamond set into the top. At first she had told Regina it was too much and told her to take it back but Regina wasn't having any of it and slid it onto Emma's finger with the widest smile the blonde had ever seen.

They had made love again but had been careful to not get carried away and kept things slow and gentle in an effort to keep control over both of their magical urges. Some bed shaking had occurred when Regina peaked but on the whole they managed to not blow anymore electrics which Emma was pleased with. She stared at the ring again with a goofy smile on her face, she never thought she would be the settling down type.

“Good morning,” Regina’s voice sounded from the doorway and Emma looked up at her with a grin.

“Hi,” she whispered, “where were you?”

“I couldn’t sleep,” Regina admitted, “I made the potion,” she said lightly.

“Oh,” Emma sat up and rubbed her eyes to dislodge some of the sleep, “that was fast.”

“It’s eleven o’clock in the morning,” Regina pointed out with a smile.

“What!?” Emma spun around to grab her phone from the bedside table and check the time, “why didn’t you wake me?”

“Because you haven’t had much sleep for the last couple of nights, I thought I’d let you wake naturally,” Regina chuckled, “I didn’t realise you’d sleep most of the day away. I made you waffles.”

“Waffles?” Emma smiled, “I could get used to this.”

“You will get used to this,” Regina smiled back as she sat on the edge of the bed.

“So...” Emma grinned, “we have an announcement to make.”

“We do,” Regina nodded tentatively.

Emma frowned, “you don’t seem too happy?”

“Well, an angry mob did come to the door when Henry let slip that you were moving in,” Regina reminded the blonde sombrely.

“I’ve been thinking about that,” Emma said with a knowing nod.

“Oh?” Regina raised an interested eyebrow.

“We need a public relations campaign,” Emma nodded.

“Public relations?” Regina asked in surprise.

“You’re not who you used to be, Regina,” Emma explained earnestly, “anyone who spends some time with you can see that. You’ve earned your second chance but not everyone can see that.”

“Which is why you want me to job share with your mother,” Regina nodded in understanding.

“Exactly, if people see you working with Snow White they’ll have no option but to re-evaluate you,” Emma explained.

Regina looked towards the bedroom door and worried her lip as she considered Emma’s scheme.

“Okay,” she finally agreed, “but I will not take the role back on full time, I want to keep assisting at the stables.”

“Sounds like a great idea,” Emma nodded happily.

“You really think this is going to work?” Regina asked uncertainly.

“I do,” Emma admitted, “if I’ve learned one thing about this town it’s that these people are very resilient. Everyone here seems to have a huge, complicated backstory with both good and bad. You’re not different.”

“I brought them all here,” Regina pointed out.

“I think most people understand that Gold was the mastermind behind this place, he just used your pain to do it,” Emma reached forward and put her hand over Regina’s with a supportive squeeze.

Regina turned her hand up so their palms met, “no regrets?”

“Never,” Emma smiled happily, “you’re not getting rid of me now.”

“Good,” Regina smiled back, “I suppose we should invite your parents over to dinner to give them the news?”

“You’re actually suggesting inviting my parents to dinner? Here? In your house?” Emma mock gasped.

Regina pulled her hand back and stood up as she rolled her eyes, “maybe I was hasty in proposing to you,” she joked.

“You’re stuck with me now,” Emma said as she sat up on the bed and pulled Regina down into the tangled sheets with a giggle.

Chapter 90

Three months had passed since Regina's screaming orgasm had taken out all of the power in Storybrooke. Luckily it had been repaired the very next day by a very confused Leroy who announced that a direct lightning strike must have struck 108 Mifflin Street causing a cascade effect.

The next day, during an over the top four-course feast, Emma and Regina told the Charming's and Henry of their engagement. Henry had crashed into Regina's arms in happy excitement while Snow made a high pitched noise as she grinned and clapped her hands with giddy enthusiasm. The follow-up announcement that Regina had agreed to job share with Snow had been the icing on the cake as Snow breathed an enormous sigh of relief and admitted that she'd had no idea what she was doing and had been skating along for months. David had graciously toasted the happy couple and attempted to keep Snow's questions about wedding planning to a minimum.

Since then Regina had done her best to put her best foot forward and show the people of Storybrooke how reformed she was and engaged in a public relations campaign that any political candidate would have been proud of. Splitting her time between town hall and the stables she used every opportunity to demonstrate her newly rehabilitated self. At first there had been a very protests but they had been lacklustre and over time they disappeared altogether and Regina considered that Emma was right and that she wasn't that different to the other citizens. She wasn't going to win any popularity contests but she wasn't as hated as she had been and that was the main thing.

Emma and Regina had performed the magical linking and Emma had spent a lot of time practicing her own magic skills which also allowed her to show to the town that not all magic was bad. Now and then Regina's magic became unstable, usually when she was arguing with Snow or under a lot of stress but Emma each time managed to disperse the excess magic with no ill effects to anyone. The more often Emma stepped in and controlled the flow of magic the less Regina found she needed the blonde's efforts as she began to better

control it herself. Both Emma and Regina started to see Archie to continue Regina's therapy, usually they discussed homework tasks for Emma to help Regina with away from Archie's office.

The knock on the frame of the open door brought Regina's attention to Gold standing in the doorway with a smirk on his face.

"Madam Mayor," he smiled as he walked uninvited into the Mayor's office.

"What do you want, Gold?" Regina sighed as she looked back down at the paperwork on her desk.

"I was merely passing by, dropping off paperwork for the planning office," he said as he looked around the room and noted a painting of some birds, "she does really have awful taste doesn't she?"

"That she does," Regina agreed without looking up.

"I hear your wedding will be on Valentine's Day?" Gold queried with interest.

"Yes," she looked up at him, "you will be invited, despite being an insipid imp."

"Why thank you, Dearie," Gold said with a chuckle, "congratulations by the way."

"You already congratulated me," Regina said as she looked back down at her paperwork.

"Not on the engagement," Gold said as he swung his cane and pointed it at Regina, "on that."

Regina lifted her arms off of the desk and looked down in confusion.

"The baby, Dearie," Gold laughed, "congratulations on the baby."

Regina dropped her pen to the desk and looked down at her stomach in shock, “what do you mean?”

“You’re pregnant, didn’t you know?” Gold looked at her in surprise.

“Do you really think I’d be acting like this if I knew?” Regina hissed as she stood up and stared down at her stomach in panic.

“I thought you knew,” Gold admitted, “I thought that’s what that little show was about three months ago,” he raised his hand as if reading a cinematic title, “the night the lights went out,” he laughed.

Regina paled and held onto the desk for support and Gold quickly hobbled over to her and took her arm supportively, “sit down before you fall down.”

“I... I can’t be pregnant,” Regina said with a shaky voice as the furniture in the room started to shake gently indicating her magic flowing uncontrolled through the room.

Gold knelt in front of her calmly and took one of her hands in between his and looked at her seriously, “you’re pregnant, three months along.”

“I can’t carry a child,” Regina said through panicked tears, “I’ll lose it... like the others...”

Gold nodded his sudden understanding, “you won’t lose this baby, you can’t, it’s protected. It’s a child of magic, created by magic and protected by magic.”

Emma appeared in the middle of the room in a cloud of white smoke, facing the wrong way because she was still learning the finer arts of transporting herself.

She spun around and looked at Regina in confusion, “Regina? Are you okay?”

“She’s fine, Miss Swan,” Gold told her as he stood up and smiled down at his former student.

Emma rushed around and shouldered him out of the way and knelt beside Regina and looked up at the tear-stained face of her lover as the furniture in the room stopped shaking, “Regina?”

“I’m pregnant,” Regina stared at Emma in wonderment, “we’re having a baby.”

Emma blinked and looked at Gold as if to ask if her future wife was losing her grip on reality.

“She’s right, Miss Swan,” Gold smirked, “your... activities three months ago produced a baby. It’s not unheard of between true loves.”

“Y-you’re pregnant?” Emma looked at Regina with a questioning smile.

“It would seem so,” Regina nodded.

“The baby is protected,” Gold quickly interjected, “she will be able to carry this baby to term. However you might wish to rethink the wedding date, she’ll be showing by then.”

Emma suddenly smacked Regina on the arm and Regina looked up at her, “what was that for?!”

“You blamed your weight gain on me!” Emma cried, “you told me I made you eat too many chocolates at Christmas!”

Gold shook his head, “ah, young love,” he muttered as he turned to leave, “congratulations to you both,” he said as he exited the room.

“Are you okay?” Emma asked seriously.

Regina nodded slowly, “it will take a while to sink in... but... yes,” she smiled, “I’m pregnant.”

“You’re pregnant,” Emma agreed with a smile and a nod.

“You’re pregnant?!” Snow’s voice sounded in a happy scream from the doorway as she dropped an archive box of paper on the floor, “I’m going to

be a mom and a grandma in the same year?!"

Chapter 91

Regina was absolutely right, it did take a while to sink in. For the next two weeks she was constantly remembering and forgetting that she was pregnant, the happy surprise shocked her slightly less each time she recalled the fact but she was nearly four months along and still not quite believing she was pregnant.

Emma, on the other hand, made up for the fact that Regina wasn't necessarily always aware of her state. Regina always knew that Emma had a caring and nurturing side, one that was especially prevalent when it came to Regina, but she had no idea that a militant Florence Nightingale would replace her fiancée.

The first law Emma had enacted in her role as Regina's primary caregiver was the immediate adherence to a new schedule. As long as Regina could remember the blonde had been a total disaster when it came to paperwork but suddenly she was able to construct a full weekly schedule which was broken down into fifteen minute segments. The schedule included meals, snacks, rest periods, naps, meditation and even a new bedtime which Regina had broken once as a show of defiance only to be poofed into her pyjamas and then bed by an irate blonde.

After a short debate, where only Henry was arguing against, the wedding was put back until much later in the year. Henry had pushed to go ahead with Valentine's Day under the guise that he deemed it to be the most romantic day of the year. However after some quiet time with Regina he eventually admitted he was worried that if they put it off they might fall out of love again and it was then that Regina and Emma were reminded of Henry's young age despite appearing so mature. The women worked extra hard on proving to Henry that their love was strong and lasting and even assigned him as their official wedding planner, even if in name only.

On the first day of February Regina sat down at her desk in her home study and started up her laptop to begin work, part of Emma's rigid new schedule

included more time working from home rather than going into Storybrooke. At first Regina had resisted being coddled but when she realised that would mean spending less time with Snow, who had become unbearable with wedding and baby fever, Regina had gratefully accepted her fate.

“Morning,” Emma said as she stepped into the study while pinning her Sheriff’s badge to her belt.

“Morning,” Regina groused miserably.

Emma pouted at Regina, “what’s up?”

“I’m hungry,” Regina mumbled.

“Really?” Emma smiled, “didn’t you just eat breakfast?”

“Yes but it wasn’t enough, I’m eating for two now,” Regina looked up at Emma pathetically.

“You know that you’re not actually eating for two, right?” Emma laughed, “you’re eating for you and something the size of a chocolate bar.”

“Chocolate,” Regina breathed happily at the very thought of chocolate. Since the pregnancy her craving for sugar had been driven off of the charts, normally she would be very careful with what she ate but nowadays Emma had to forcibly remove food from Regina’s mouth.

“You want French Toast, don’t you?” Emma asked with a raised eyebrow at the pitiful sight before her.

“Not from Granny’s,” Regina mumbled with big, pleading eyes looking up at Emma.

“You want me to make you French Toast?” Emma laughed lightly as she walked over to the calendar on the wall and flipped over to February, the month that held her photograph.

Regina looked at the photograph with a roll of the eyes, “I wasn’t looking forward to this month,” she grumbled.

Emma looked hurt, “you said you loved that picture of me...”

Regina quickly stood up and took Emma’s hands reassuringly, “I love this picture of you, you look... beautiful, sexual, wonderful. I just don’t want to share you with the town.”

“You’re not sharing me with the town,” Emma smiled, “I’m all yours.”

Maintaining her hold on Emma’s hands she turned and looked at the calendar, “you know, I sometimes think that this calendar kick-started a lot of change in my life.”

Emma turned and looked at the calendar thoughtfully, “how so?”

“Well, if Henry hadn’t been involved in the project he wouldn’t have bought me a copy. If he hadn’t bought me a copy I wouldn’t have spoken to David about it, then he wouldn’t have invited me to dinner that evening,” Regina explained.

“Ah,” Emma caught on, “and then I wouldn’t have hounded you because I thought something was wrong. And then asked you out.”

“Precisely,” Regina looked at Emma, “you really were rather persistent.”

“Well you kept avoiding me, or trying to,” Emma shrugged with a smile.

Regina’s face turned serious, “I really dread to think what might have happened if things had gone another way...”

Emma pulled her hands free of Regina’s and wrapped her arms around the brunette and held her firmly, “don’t think like that, everything worked out for the best, like it was supposed to be fate or something.”

Regina laughed gently into Emma’s blonde hair, “well this certainly wasn’t in the book.”

“Who says the book is gospel?” Emma asked casually, “or maybe it’s part one? Maybe part two is full of you and me and all our children?”

Regina pulled back and looked at Emma with a grin, “all our children?”

Emma smiled as she joked, “sure, I want at least half a dozen, don’t you?”

“Fine, you have the next three, see how you like having to go to bed at ten every night and being denied treats,” Regina grumbled as she pulled away and sat in her office chair.

“So, I have one, you have one and then I have three?” Emma asked with a frown, “I thought you were good at math?”

“I’m older than you,” Regina pointed out.

“Only when you feel like admitting it,” Emma added, “besides I thought you said you liked being pregnant?”

“I do,” Regina smiled and it was one of those rare smiles that took Emma’s breath away such was its sincerity, “I feel blessed. I’d feel more blessed if there were French Toast..”

Emma laughed as she turned around to leave the room, “yes, Mistress, right away, Mistress.”

Emma walked into the kitchen where Henry was sat on a stool eating his cereal, she looked at him with a smile and quickly walked over and wrapped him up in a big hug.

Henry froze in place, spoon balanced in mid-air, “erm, Mom?”

“One minute,” Emma promised as she held him tightly and squeezed her eyes closed to revel in the moment. After a minute had passed she pulled away and Henry looked at her with concern.

“Are you crying?”

“A little,” Emma admitted with a big smile, “happy tears.”

Henry frowned in confusion.

“Don’t tell your mom but we’re blowing off school today, I’m taking you out for ice cream,” Emma told him as she wiped at her eyes.

“Cool!” Henry grinned as he hopped off of the stool to clear away his cereal bowl, “why though?”

“Because you got your mom that calendar,” she nodded with a smile as she opened a cupboard to get the ingredients for French Toast.

“So?” Henry asked with confusion.

“It just set in motion a lot of things, without that calendar things would be very different,” Emma explained as she picked up a frying pan.

“True, but I only got it because it had that dwarf picture in it,” Henry pointed out before doubling over with laughter as he remembered a mental image of the ridiculous scene.

Emma shook her head as she watched her son barely able to control himself with laughter and she thought about their next child and wondered if it would be a boy or a girl and what personality it would have. A mental image of the kitchen full of family flooded her brain, Regina bottle feeding a baby, twins at the table doing their homework, Henry in his last year of high school and a toddler helping Emma to decorate cupcakes. She looked down at her stomach and thought, *and hopefully another one in the oven to make the full half dozen.*

THE END